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THE  
BRAES OF YARROW.

*A Romance.*

BY  
CHARLES GIBBON,

AUTHOR OF "ROBIN GRAY," "IN HONOUR BOUND," "FOR THE KING,"  
"IN LOVE AND WAR," "QUEEN OF THE MEADOW,"  
"WHAT WILL THE WORLD SAY?" ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*  
VOL. I.

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TO  
MY BOYS,

C. ARCHER, ERNEST, AND HERBERT BLACK GIBBON.

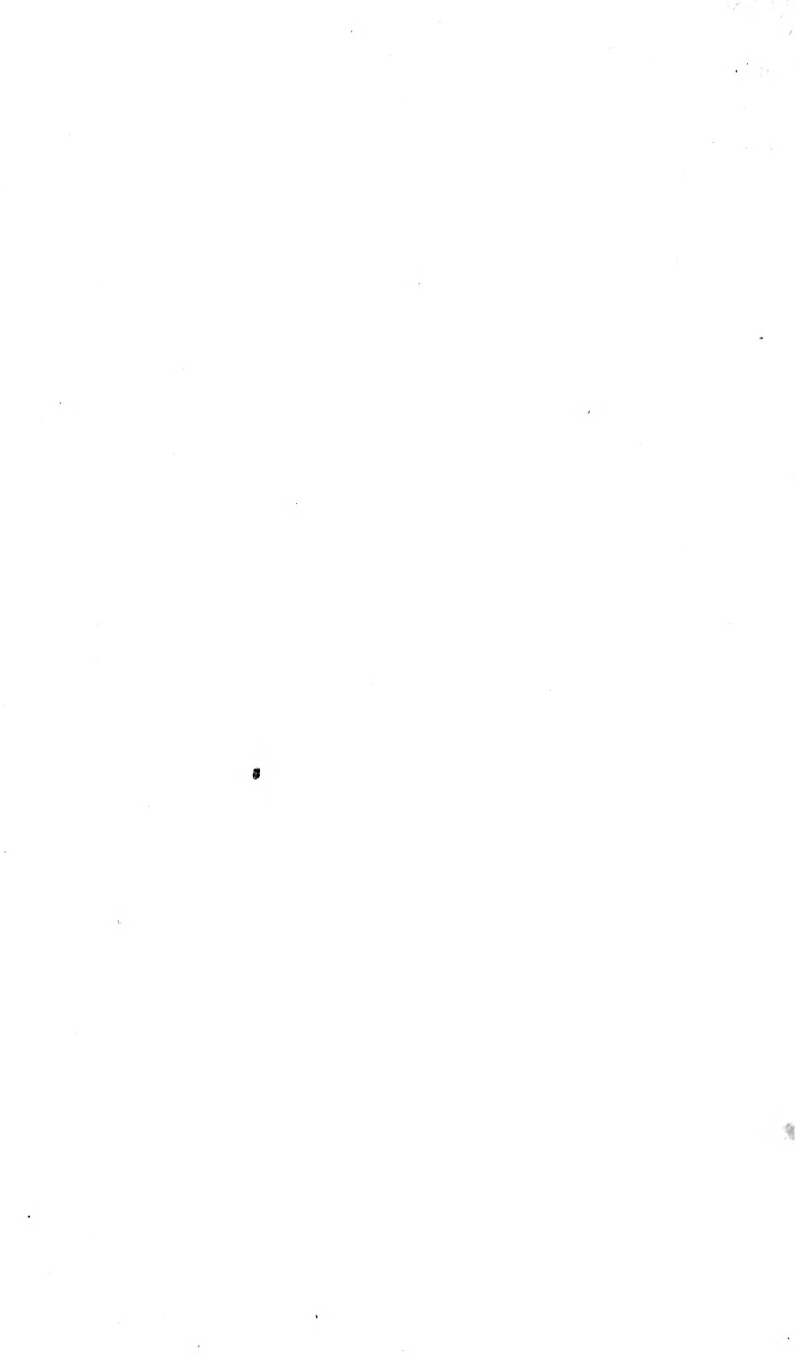
*As my comrades through a period of trial to us all, I wish to link your names with this book. It is an old-fashioned story of hairbreadth escapes, of mysteries, of hard fighting, of much suffering and self-sacrifice, of fidelity and treachery—and, in short, of all the customary elements of a melodrama presented under a gauze of history. There are in it sundry historical anachronisms, but I am not going to point them out: first, because you ought to be able to discover them yourselves; and next, because there will be plenty of critics to direct your attention to them. I only hope that you will enjoy the story, and regard it as simply a Romance of the days of old.*

CHARLES GIBBON.

LONDON, June, 1881.

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## CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE RAID OF HALSTANE ... ..	1
II.	OUT IN THE SNOW ... ..	25
III.	A TOKEN FROM FLODDEN ... ..	38
IV.	THE KNIGHT OF THE MASK ... ..	49
V.	THE REVEL AT TUSHIELAW ... ..	67
VI.	THE RIGHT-HAND GAUNTLET ... ..	82
VII.	THE PACKMAN AND THE FRIAR ... ..	103
VIII.	FLYING AND SEEKING ... ..	118
IX.	A SECRET MISSION ... ..	136
X.	SOMETHING MYSTERIOUS ... ..	149
XI.	IN FORTUNE'S WAY ... ..	173
XII.	THE QUEEN'S RIDE ... ..	187
XIII.	CUPID'S PERPLEXITIES ... ..	213
XIV.	THE TEST OF TRUTH ... ..	229
XV.	THE MYSTERY OF THE ABBEY CHAPEL ... ..	243
XVI.	ENTOMBED ... ..	263
XVII.	LOST OR SAVED ... ..	278
XVIII.	A SINGULAR WOOING ... ..	291



# THE BRAES OF YARROW.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE RAID OF HALSTANE.

“Then till’t they gaed wi’ heart and hand,  
The blows fell thick as bickering hail;  
And mony a horse ran masterless,  
And mony a comely cheek was pale.”

*The Fair Dodhead.*

“DING doon Halstane,” was the hoarse yell of two hundred voices on the banks of Yarrow. “Ding doon Halstane,” was echoed along the surrounding hills and through the bossy dells; and two hundred men rode steadily forward with pulses quickened by the prospect of plunder.

The keen December wind soughed through the dense forest of Ettrick; the bare trees

swayed and crackled and groaned; the snow creaked crisply beneath the feet of the mosstroopers' horses; and the Yarrow water with its melancholy murmur flowed onward to the Ettrick through the dull white mist of the morning.

Four months previously—that is to say, the 18th September, 1513—the battle of Flodden had been fought and lost to Scotland; the rashly chivalrous James IV. had fallen; his child, not yet two years old, had been declared the fifth King James; and the Queen Dowager Margaret, sister of the Eighth Henry of England, was regent for the nonce. All Scotland was mourning its heavy losses, and the devil-may-care borderers of both nations, who heeded not a bodle which side was uppermost, counted upon a rich harvest, and set to work with a will to gather in their stores from North and South.

The notable rascal, Adam Scott of Tushielaw, was amongst the first to avail himself of the distracted condition of his own

country. He could not do much business on the opposite ground just at this time, for the army of the poet-soldier, Earl of Surrey, was still unpleasantly near the debatable land. Wherefore, like a wise pilferer, he turned his efforts toward the point where profit was most certain. He had been served with a dish of clean spurs, as an indication that his larder was empty, so he buckled on his armour and laid about him right and left to stock his byre.

He had been acknowledged King of the Borders, and accordingly he was bound to support his followers, and to entertain his neighbouring chieftains, royally. This he rarely failed to do, for he had a strong hand, a sinewy body, and a sharp wit to plan and to carry the plan generally to a successful issue.

As the troop rode up the Vale of Yarrow the chief led the way. His muscular frame was covered with a light shirt of mail, but, as if to show his hardihood or contempt of

death, his head was unprotected save by an ordinary Selkirk bonnet. His principal arms were a long sword of more than average weight, and at his saddle-bow a ponderous axe. By his side rode a rubicund-visaged but slim-bodied man, whose dress was as much at odds with his position as his face and body were with each other. The face was that of a jovial liver and good cup companion; the body might have been that of a half-starved friar. His dress was a mixture of the mosstrooper's and the monk's; light boots, a leather jerkin, and over that a somewhat worn friar's gown and cowl. The cowl, however, was not in use, as the head was covered by a deerskin cap.

“I would give something to have a grip o’ the Hangingshaw ladle at this minute, for I’m as drouthy as a fish on dry land,” said he of the cowl, looking thirstily in the direction of Hangingshaw, the home of the Murrays, where every comer was treated with a draught of ale from an enormous drinking-vessel called the ladle.

“Ye shall have a waft o’ the best brew in Halstane before long,” responded Scott, laughing hoarsely.

The countenance of the other assumed a sour expression, and he spoke moodily :

“Ay, but we’ll have to take a long waft of blood first.”

“Hey, Mess Simon, do you grow timorous ?”

Mess Simon shrugged his shoulders, and shook the cowl which hung on his back.

“Not I, so long as there is fair fighting; but we are making a raid upon a deserted home, where is only the husbandless dame, her daughter, and some old men who were not worth taking to Flodden.”

“Well,” growled Scott, nettled by the suggestion that he was taking an unfair advantage of the misfortunes of Halstane, “they played us foul in hanging Ding-a’-doon’s brother, and Spens is our foe to the death.”

“And wow but the leddy’s a bonny

ledly," sung or rather bellowed a loud coarse voice behind them.

The voice indeed was almost equal to the roar of a bull in loudness ; and this became a matter of marvel when the hearer recognized the owner of the tremendous voice in a creature scarcely four feet high, and whose legs were barely long enough to cross the back of the horse he rode. What he lacked in height, however, Gilpin Horner, the manikin, made up for in breadth and in the size of his head. He owned a body equal to that of Falstaff himself, and his head, with its bushy red hair, was as large as any two average-sized heads of men rolled together. His arms were long enough to reach his knees, his mouth was big enough to take in a large apple whole, his eyes were of bovine size and expression ordinarily. But when in a passion they were capable of expressing almost a fiendish malice. His eyebrows were thick and lowering ; and his nose big and hooked like a Jew's.

It will be admitted that the appearance of this personage was even more peculiar than that of Mess Simon. To the superstitious minds of the clan there was a sufficient air of the uncanny about him to obtain for him an amount of fear which served in the place of respect or reverence, and gave him more freedom of action and speech than any man among them dared claim except the chief, and the priest, Mess Simon, who had cast his lot with theirs for reasons known only to himself.

In answer to the dwarf's interruption Tushielaw looked round angrily, growling :

“Take care that tongue of yours does not wag too fast for the safety of your head.”

“Haw, haw !” roared the dwarf, laughing and shaking his sides as if he had discovered some excellent joke.

“Stop your noise,” muttered a giant-looking fellow who rode beside Horner, but whose voice was quite drowned in the thundering guffaws of the latter.

The chief frowned, and, touching the sides

of his horse lightly, rode up to the top of the hill before his men.

He drew rein on the summit as the tower of Halstane was in sight. He suddenly raised his hand as if giving a signal, and the two hundred borderers came to an abrupt stand upon the brow of the hill.

“What see you?” cried the man who rode beside the dwarf, and who was Patrick Scott, foster-brother of the chief. The gigantic proportions of this worthy, and his numerous feats of strength, had obtained for him the significant title of Ding-a’-doon.

The chief rejoined them.

“Our approach has been discovered. When I reached the hill-top I saw a knave galloping helter-skelter to the tower. We must be ready for a tussle. Advance.”

With a loud shout the mosstroopers put their horses in motion, and, keeping well together, galloped over the hill and across the plain, approaching like one dark cloud the tower of Halstane.

The ancestral home of Sir Walter Spens

stood upon a craggy foundation. A fosse of some depth surrounded it, and held water enough to make it unfordable. The tower itself was tall, square, and strong; and fifty men might easily have held it in despite of an enemy of double the strength of Scott had they been sufficiently provisioned.

But at present there were not more than twenty men in the tower, and they were mostly old and feeble.

They had received intimation of their approaching danger in time enough to drive the cattle into the court, to raise the narrow bridge which crossed the fosse, and to close the entrance gate. These indications, however, of a resolution to fight could only mean that the ancient vassals of the house of Spens preferred death in defending the home, the wife, and daughter of their absent chief to mercy at the hands of the King of the Borders.

“Curse them,” muttered Scott, “if they mean to fight they shall have it hot enough,

I warrant you. Hither, Hornie—ride up and tell the Lady Spens what I have come for.”

Raising a little white flag which he carried at his saddle-bow, and striking his horse vigorously with the lance he carried, the dwarf rode from the place where the raiders had halted up to the tower.

Waving his white flag, and raising his voice to its loudest pitch, he cried—

“Ho there, ye who keep the tower of Spens! as the herald of Tushielaw, our right true and mighty King of the Borders, I charge ye answer.”

The thundering voice rang through the tower, but no answer was given. The summons was repeated twice, and before the dwarf had finished speaking for the third time ten men appeared upon the rampart; and immediately thereafter Lady Spens and her daughter, a child of some six years, advanced to the parapet.

The lady was tall, and her form possessed that grace which is dignified without being

in any respect masculine. Her hair was long, soft, and brown; the eyes blue and expressive; the features regular, and the complexion fair. In brief, she was fully entitled to the compliments of the country side, which recognized her as the bonny lady of Halstane.

Her child Alice gave promise of rivalling her mother's charms. The big blue eyes of the little one gazed bewilderedly about, and then the lovely young face was turned upward to the mother's, as if seeking there the explanation of the commotion and anxiety which had suddenly disturbed the household. Always she clung timorously to her parent's dress as if instinctively recognizing the danger she could not understand.

The long yellow hair of the child fell over her shoulders, and the wind played with it gaily, and now and again the mother fondled it and smoothed it back from the white brow, the while she gazed into the innocent eyes as if seeking there some

strength for the task she had to perform.

Her ladyship spoke to the man who stood nearest her person ; and Andrew Howie, one of the lealest vassals of the Spens, saluted Gilpin Horner, the manikin.

“ My leddy bids me speer your master’s will.”

The mouth of Horner opened wide, showing large white teeth and a cavern within, as he grinned broadly.

“ My master’s will is no easy to tell,” he responded ; “ but gin your bonny leddy would consent to open the yetts and let us inside Halstane, she can speer his will from himsel’, and I’se warrant the answer’ll be pleasant enough.”

“ We dinna open the barn door to the wolf. We’ve shut the yetts in your master’s teeth, and if ye would come in ye maun just open them yoursel’s.”

“ Well, that’s as you please ; we’re no particular.”

“ Who bade you say yea or nay on that

head?" interrupted the harsh voice of Tushielaw himself.

He had impatiently noted from the distance the slow progress his emissary seemed to make in his mission, and had at length galloped up to decide the parley.

The dwarf grinned, but he drew his horse back a few paces, yielding the ground to the chief. The latter, raising himself in the saddle and baring his head, modulated the gruffness of his voice as far as possible in addressing the lady.

"I come, madam, with two hundred stout men and true, to offer you our protection. We ask you to trust us, and fear nothing, for no harm shall come to you, or any that is with you, so long as we are near."

"The hawk offers succour to the dove," rejoined her ladyship, quietly, but with a degree of contempt sufficient to make Tushielaw frown and bite his lip. She proceeded. "If there be any meaning in your words, good sir, withdraw your men and give us leave to pass in peace to Edinburgh, where

I may claim protection from those who owe it me."

"You refuse to treat with me as a friend?" he said, scowlingly.

"I have acquainted you with the only course whereby you can prove your friendship," was the dignified answer.

"As the foe of Spens, then, I charge you surrender the tower and all who are with you."

"As the wife of Spens, I refuse."

"Answer, then, for the consequences."

"I will."

Furious at his reception, but impressed, by the very defiance of the lady, with a deeper passion for her than he had yet known, Tushielaw wheeled his horse about and rode back to his men.

"Haw, haw, haw!" bellowed the dwarf, with his unearthly laugh, as he lowered the white flag, pricked with his poignard the huge horse upon which he was perched, and careered after his master.

At the same time the standard of the

Spens was raised on the top of the tower, and the few brave hearts within prepared to die.

The Borderers were speedily in motion, this time with slower, steadier steps than before. As they advanced they divided into three companies, each approaching the tower at a different point.

The centre company comprised a hundred men, led by Tushielaw. The other companies comprised fifty men each, and were led respectively by Ding-a'-doon and Bauldy Fyfe, who ranked next in authority to the chief's foster-brother.

At first the dull tramp of the horses' hoofs was the only sound heard in the valley; but presently the wild slogan of the Scotts of Tushielaw broke upon the air, and hill and valley and forest rung again with "A Tushielaw! A Tushielaw!"

They were received with a shower of bolts from the hackbuts, and the slogan rose more fiercely as a number of the assailants fell. There was no answering cry from the

tower; for within there were only a handful of men fighting with a desperate hopelessness.

Twenty men, propelling the trunk of a tree upon four wheels, dashed forward to the main entrance. This stout battering-ram did good service, for the first blow shattered the small upraised bridge in front of the portcullis. A loud shout of triumph recognized the accomplishment of this feat. But even as the shout rose a shower of heavy stones, thrown from the summit of the tower, descended upon the besiegers. Groans, shrieks, oaths, and yells followed. The fallen men were quickly replaced by others, and a small *sowie* was brought into play.

A “*sowie*” was a species of wooden roof used in attacks upon fortresses, and was run up against the walls to protect the besiegers from the showers of stones usually thrown from the battlements, whilst they forced an entrance beneath its shelter. The name of this instrument of war has been, in modern

days, given to the triangle-topped haystacks in many parts of the country.

Under the sowie the battering-ram was used again. The iron gate rung with the concussion ; a number of the bars snapped, and many of the stanchions gave way. Another shout, and another discharge of stones, but this time with little effect, for they mostly slid off the wooden shield, and fell harmlessly into the fosse. Two or three stones, however, broke through the roof, and maimed a few men.

Again the ram was propelled against the gate and as it broke down, a dozen blazing torches were dropped upon the sowie, which speedily took fire, and promised soon to become useless. It was the last effort of the stout defenders to keep the enemy without the walls, and it proved of little service.

The battering-ram was now used as a bridge, and upon it the raiders rapidly crossed the fosse one after another. The passage into the court was defended by two

old men, but one soon fell beneath the blow of a long Jeddart axe, and the other hastily fled.

And amidst all this terrible din and confusion, whilst the agonizing groans of the fallen and the fiendish yells of the victors made the air hideous, Lady Spens, the delicate beauty of Halstane, had rallied her handful of faithful vassals upon the battlements, and by her own calm bearing and brave words cheered them to continue the desperate struggle for life. When, however, she perceived that an entrance had been gained, she knew that further attempt to defend their home was useless. Little mercy was to be expected from Tushielaw or his followers if they were true to their repute. But what little hope she might obtain she resolved to seek for the sake of the few trusty ones who were still with her.

They had numbered twenty-five before the fight began; there were only ten around her now.

Andrew Howie had endeavoured to persuade her to seek safety in flight whilst they were yet strong enough to conceal her absence for a little time. His persuasion failed, for she would not budge—not even for the sake of fair-haired Alice—as long as she thought her presence might aid them in any way.

She advanced now to the parapet to wave her handkerchief in token of submission.

She drew back shuddering—it was too late.

Thick blue clouds of smoke ascended upon all sides, wreathing and curling serpent-like.

The principal weapon of defence had been turned against the defenders, and the tower was on fire.

The men who had crossed the fosse had torn down the burning sowie, and had recklessly thrust blazing portions of it into every ignitable corner. At the same time others speedily formed a rude bridge with

some loose planks, drove the cattle out of the court, and admitted as many of the assailants as was thought necessary to complete the work.

The first to cross the bridge was Tushielaw, who made instantly for the spiral staircase leading to the battlement. He was met by Ding-a'-doon, who was begrimed with dust and drunk with excitement, and otherwise bore indications that he was working hard and enjoying himself. The heavy axe, which rested upon his shoulder as he hurried towards the point where he met his chief, was a sickly sight. He was accompanied by half a dozen begrimed and excited men who delighted as much as himself in the turmoil.

A signal from Tushielaw, and they followed him close as he sprang up the narrow winding staircase. Twice the passage was contested, but the strong arm and thorough hardihood of the leader broke down all barriers. At the last turn of the stairs, however, the struggle became fiercer

than it had yet been, for the men who defended this place fought as men only fight when resolved to die.

The assailants were forced backward, and Tushielaw ground his teeth as he found the action of his arms hampered by those behind him almost as much as by those in front. He lost his balance, and the long sword of a white-headed old man, whose eyes burned with the enthusiasm of youth, was raised to strike him down. But the devil favoured his minion, and Ding-a'-doon, using his long Jeddart axe over the shoulder of his chief, parried the blow, and cleft the white head in twain. Then with a triumphant shout Tushielaw and his followers sprang over the body and out upon the battlement.

There were only four men to oppose them, and the fate of the struggle was speedily decided.

“Where is the wench and that yellow-haired chick of hers?” roared Tushielaw.

The others echoed the cry, but none could answer it.

Lady Spens and her daughter had disappeared.

Confusion followed; men ran hither and thither seeking wildly for the fugitives, and above all the din was heard the loud bellowing laugh of the dwarf.

“Haw, haw, haw!”

Attracted by the sound, they looked about and presently discovered the manikin, with a face rendered more hideous than usual by being blackened over, with his red hair and his clothes in the same condition, seated upon the side of the white mouth of a chimney, holding his sides as if fearing they would burst with the laughter which seemed to convulse him.

Tushielaw advanced to him furiously.

“Speak, imp of the foul fiend, and give one good reason for your mirth, else you shall laugh in another key. What have you seen?”

Hornie continued his laugh despite the angry gaze fixed upon him.

“ Weel,” he answered at intervals, “ whilst ye were wasting time fechtin your way up the stair I came up the lum quietly, and got to the tap in time to see my lady, the bairn, and Andrew Howie skelping aff this gate.”

He slipped from his perch, and passing over close to the parapet inserted his poignard at the side of one of the floor stones, raised it, and disclosed a dark hole.

“ They went down here—but how ? ” he said, scratching his head. Suddenly his eyes brightened and he chuckled with satisfaction, “ They had a ladder, and they’ve ta’en it down after them. Gie’s a haud o’ your lance, man.”

He snatched the weapon from the man who was standing nearest, probed the hole he had uncovered, and by reaching his long arm down touched the bottom with the lance.

He thereupon dropped into the hole and slid down the lance. He called to those above, and Tushielaw followed him, next Ding-a’-doon and two others.

They found themselves in a narrow dark passage. They groped their way along after Hornie, who suddenly stumbled upon a door, which burst open, and supplied some light to the passage. They now entered a large chamber, but it was so densely filled with smoke that they could see nothing, and were glad to step back to the passage for air.

“Confusion!” growled Tushielaw, fuming with rage and disappointment; “let the place be surrounded and every corner searched. Half of my share of the day’s capture goes to whoever finds the Lady Spens or the bairn. She shall either die or be in my hands to-night.”

There was wilder hurry and confusion than ever when this order went forth.

## CHAPTER II.

### OUT IN THE SNOW.

“ Why runs thy stream, O Yarrow, Yarrow, red ?  
Why on thy brae 's heard the voice of sorrow ?  
And why yon melancholious weeds,  
Hung on the bonny birks of Yarrow ? ”

*Hamilton of Bangour.*

A vigorous but unavailing search was kept up in the tower and neighbouring woods whilst daylight lasted. When darkness came torches and fires were lit by the parties which surrounded the now ruined keep. The secret passage by which the lady and her daughter had escaped had not been discovered ; and Tushielaw suspected that the fugitives might be still about the building waiting for nightfall to get away.

Those who returned from the forest were posted in a circle, with the lights around the tower; and those who had remained on guard during the day were despatched to scour the district.

Tushielaw himself, heedless of snow and darkness, set out with a party of six in the direction of St. Mary's loch, intending to move on to Selkirk.

The suspicion of the border chief had been nearer the mark than he had calculated.

When Lady Spens had the conviction forced upon her that not only was all hope of successful defence lost, but that the hope of obtaining any mercy at the hands of the infuriated conquerors was also gone, she had yielded to the repeated prayers of Howie and the rest of her kinsmen. Relinquishing her child to the strong arms of Andrew, she had descended the ladder leading to the dark passage in the wall.

Here a secret door was moved, and the party reached a long narrow flight of stairs which conducted them to the vaults of the

keep. Moving cautiously and still in the dark, listening with pulses quickened to pain to the murmur and din going on above, and indicating that the work of destruction speeded merrily, they traversed the vaults till they reached the northern wall. At this point Howie consigned the fair-haired little Alice to the arms of her mother, and groped along the wall.

He muttered to himself uneasily, and the lady trembled for the result of his search. The secret of the door for which he was seeking was intrusted only to the family, and on occasions to the chief seneschal of the house. The door was formed of an iron frame filled in with stonework, and so cunningly wrought and concealed by Italian workmen that, even with lights, it was not easy to find. There was not much marvel, then, that honest Andrew had a difficulty in finding the door in the dark, and agitated as he was for his lady's safety and for his own.

"Holy Mary be praised!" he gasped at last, in an undertone.

The stone door yielded, and they passed into a damp cavern cut in the rock. The sides were slimy with the constant moisture caused by the water penetrating from the moat. The ground, too, was wet and slippery, and the progress of the fugitives was slow. Howie again took the child, and Lady Spens leant upon his shoulder. In this manner they proceeded down the subterranean hall, which was about four hundred yards in length, and had its outlet amongst a dense thicket of furze near the river.

When within a short distance of the outlet they paused. Andrew, doffing his leathern jerkin, spread it upon the ground, and upon this his mistress, with her wearied and frightened child, rested.

Little Alice clung to her mother's neck, now crying with hunger and fatigue, then trying to smile through her tears, with a childish perception of her mother's distress, and making a feeble effort to give her comfort.

“My poor bairn, my poor bairn!” sobbed the lady, clasping her convulsively to her breast; “we are homeless and friendless now, since the hungry wolf of Tushielaw has turned us from our home. Oh, had your father been here: but he——”

She clasped the child more closely to her breast, moaning. She dared not think of the absent husband, for since he had gathered his men, and departed with pennons gaily flying in the wind, to join his King in the fatal expedition which had terminated at Flodden, she had heard nothing of him or from him.

Was he living or dead?

The question haunted Lady Margaret’s mind by day and night. She prayed and hoped, and hoped and waited for his return. But he had not come; neither had there come any tidings of his fate. But she would not, she dared not, think that he was gone for ever.

And yet the flower of Scottish chivalry had fallen by the side of their King. In

spite of all, she hoped on and waited, finding ground for faith in the fact that the fate of the King himself was still unknown. Every rumour that suggested that the King lived, every futile attempt to decide whether he had fallen on the field, as the English asserted, encouraged the idea that the stalwart Knight Sir Walter Spens was alive and with James, and that he would return by-and-by.

It might be, she thought, that the chivalrous nature of the King, writhing under the shame of the terrible defeat of Flodden—a defeat resulting wholly from his own foolhardiness—unable to brook the spectacle of the misery of his people, whom he had bereft of fathers, sons, brothers, and husbands, had sought forgetfulness, or at least relief, in oblivion. And perhaps her husband had been one of the few who had accompanied the unhappy monarch in his self-imposed exile. Perhaps the King, as rumour would have it, was making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem

in expiation of his folly. Perhaps, as another rumour gave out, he had been carried away to Home Castle and murdered. In any case Sir Walter might still live, and for that she prayed. The iron girdle of the King, which he had worn day and night in penance for the wrong which he had done his father, had not been found. Surely if his fate remained so much a mystery, surely if there could be any hope that James lived, surely she might cherish the thought that her husband was with him.

Days waned, weeks passed, and now the fourth month had arrived without bringing any tidings of her husband or the King. She still hoped, more feebly than before perhaps, but at any rate she would not permit herself to think of him as amongst the dead.

Whilst Lady Spens and her child rested, Andrew proceeded cautiously to the outlet. He listened long and intently, before he thrust the furze bushes aside and peered forth.

A heavy drizzling snow was falling, and spreading like a white sheet over hill and dale. It already lay several feet deep upon the ground. The winter sun was sinking redly behind the hills, touching their white heads with a golden tint. Beneath ran the melancholy murmuring Yarrow; behind glared the lights which the raiders had kindled at Halstane.

Andrew could see in the fading light sundry bands of horsemen coming and going, like black shadows on the snow. He divined the meaning of their movements, and decided to await darkness before attempting to conduct his lady from her present concealment.

“It’ll bother them to find us here,” he muttered; “but gif we were ance on open ground, they could track us easy eneuch.”

He returned to his mistress, and with what simple skill he could command endeavoured to relieve the gloom of her position, so far as was possible. But, adding to the horror of the position, the

cold became intense, and, with the dampness of the place, numbed the unfortunate lady's limbs, until she could scarcely hold the child Alice to her breast. Happily the child slept, and was thus spared some of the suffering her mother endured.

At intervals Andrew made an inspection of the ground above, and at length declared that they might leave their dismal hiding-place.

Wrapping the still sleeping Alice in the jerkin which had served as a seat, he took her in his arms, and led the way. With difficulty Lady Spens followed. They scrambled through the furze, and out into the snow, which reached above their knees, and rendered walking slow and painful.

The dread of capture gave Lady Margaret more than common strength: but still she could only drag her way feebly along. Every step seemed to sink deeper and deeper into the snow, and with every step her feet became heavier. Every fresh effort

seemed only to reveal the greater weight of the clogs attached to her.

The Yarrow, swollen with the snow, roared loudly as it rushed onward; and the wind seemed to blow more keenly in the teeth of the wayfarers.

“Gif we could only reach Newark, my leddy, I’ll get a horse for ye, or steal ane,” said Andrew, trying to speak bravely, although his own heart was growing faint enough; “and syne we can snap our fingers at the red thief o’ Tushielaw. Keep a stout heart, my leddy; it’s no very far noo.”

Again she struggled forward, and the wind beat against her, and the snow clogged her feet, and the Yarrow moaned a weird dirge-like moan as it rolled by.

The numbness of her limbs seemed to be gradually stretching to her heart and brain. The thought of capture lost its terror, and the white glistening snow seemed to fascinate her, and drag her down toward it. Rest, forgetfulness it seemed to offer, and the numbed brain could not comprehend the danger of the fascination.

Without a word, without a sound, she sunk slowly down upon the snow.

Andrew's heart gave a big jump into his throat when he discovered what had occurred.

"My leddy, my leddy," he cried imploringly, "for the Holy Mither's sake dinna, dinna lie doon there. Rise, rise, my leddy; it's only a wee bittock to Newark noo."

She did not move or speak.

"The bairn'll dee, my leddy; the bairn'll dee."

There was a painful movement of the head, and a gleam of consciousness in the eyes. But the consciousness disappeared instantly.

The old man bowed his head over the burden he carried in his arms and groaned.

"Oh, Lord, it's a' ower wi' us noo. I canna carry them baith, and I canna leave the puir body here; sae we maun a' dee thegither."

He was succumbing to his fatigue and

despair, when he was startled by the neigh of a horse.

He looked up quickly, and by the aid of the faint light the stars were beginning to give, he descried a horseman close at hand.

“It’s only ae man, and if it had been three I would hae tried their strength, for the sake o’ this bonny lamb and my leddy there.”

He laid the child beside the unconscious mother, and tightly grasping the long axe which he had been using as a staff, he strode sturdily over the snow, and planted himself in what seemed the horseman’s way.

When there were only some ten paces between them, Andrew spoke.

“Haud ye there, whaeve ye are. I want your horse, and I’ll hae’t, or ye’ll hae my life.”

The horseman, for an instant surprised, checked his horse. But the moment Andrew had done speaking, he made prompt answer.

“Have at ye, then.”

But instead of preparing to defend him-

self or to make an attack, Andrew gave vent to a cry of delight.

“Gilbert Elliot!”

“Hallo!” ejaculated the rider, lowering his lance, and a second time checking his horse, “who, in the fiend’s name, are you?”

“It’s me, Andrew Howie—but dinna stop to speer; here’s been the deil’s ain wark the day: Tushielaw has burnt us oot o’ hoose and hame, and here’s my leddy and her puir bairn baith deein’ wi’ cauld and hunger.”

The cavalier sprung from his horse, and leading it by the bridle, followed Andrew to where he had left the Lady Spens.

## CHAPTER III.

## A TOKEN FROM FLODDEN.

“Dool and wae for the order, sent our lads to the Border,  
The English for ance by guile wan the day.  
The flowers of the forest that fought aye the foremost,  
The prime of our land are cauld in the clay.”

*First Version of the Flowers of the Forest.*

YOUNG, tall, muscular, and well favoured. These were the characteristics which were first apparent in the person of Gilbert Elliot. A frank honest countenance, with clear grey eyes; a voice that could be sympathetic or stern as occasion required; and a bearing easy, and yet indicative of a resolute spirit. Courage and vigour of will were both his, and, young as he was, he had won his spurs in the last tournament at Edinburgh during the reign of James IV.,

having received from that monarch the golden-headed lance due to those who had shown the best prowess in the lists.

He raised the lady from her bed of snow, and silently endeavoured to restore animation by chafing her hands and breathing upon her eyes. Meanwhile Andrew, in his good awkward way, fondled child Alice, who had awakened, and endeavoured to keep her quiet by a rude species of prattle which he intended to be the same as that he had heard the nurse use sometimes. Between whiles he acquainted Master Gilbert with the events of the day.

This occupied only a brief space, for Gilbert soon discovered that his efforts to restore the lady to consciousness were unavailing.

“We must get her to some place where we can obtain assistance; here is work for the doctors,” he said hurriedly, his voice betraying emotion in spite of himself.

“Tak’ her on the horse and ride to Selkirk as fast as ye can,” suggested Andrew.

“And the child?”

Honest Andrew was puzzled.

“Ou, ay, the bairn’s a fash,” he muttered; but, brightening, “ye can tie the lassie in your cloak and carry her on your back.”

“What of yourself?”

“I’ll follow as fast as I’m able, and I’ll meet ye at the Souter’s Inn. Gif there’s a Souter left in Selkirk ye’ll no want for help for the puir leddy and her bairn.”

The plan was speedily put into execution, and Gilbert Elliot, with Alice fastened in his cloak, and the insensible mother on the saddle before him, started upon his journey, Andrew following on foot.

The horse bore its triple burden stoutly, but in some parts the snow lay so deep that it seemed almost as if they were sinking into a morass; and all the encouragement of the rider was needed to urge the animal forward. They passed up by the riverside, and before they had proceeded far the moon came out to light the way. For

that service Master Gilbert hailed the appearance of the luminary with joy; but the next moment his pleasure was somewhat abated by the consciousness of the extra risk of discovery which the light entailed.

They passed on in safety, however, for some distance beyond St. Mary's loch, and then Gilbert became aware that Lady Margaret was slowly recovering. The motion of the horse had been more effective as a reviver than all the efforts of its master.

It was some time after the first symptom of renewed life that she unclosed her eyelids and gazed up into the face of her protector. At first the gaze was expressionless; the eyes were dull and clouded. But presently a cold shudder passed over her, and a sense of something of what had occurred stirred within her.

She withdrew her eyes from the man's face; and when she looked again there was bewilderment gradually drawing into comprehension in her expression.

“Alice—my child—Andrew?” she moaned painfully.

“The bairn is safe, my lady,” said Gilbert in a subdued tone, “and with the saints’ help you shall be well in Selkirk ere long.”

Before he had finished speaking her expression had changed to one singularly mingled with recognition, fear, and hope. Her pulse bounded and beat quick; and, starting as if to withdraw from the arm which encircled her waist, she almost fell from the horse. Luckily the arm was a strong one, and she was saved.

“Why do you tremble, madam, and start from me as if the very sight of me were hideous in your eyes. Is it so?”

“No, no, no, but—only now Andrew Howie was my companion, and I was startled to find you with me—you who come to me like one from the dead. At sight of you I am filled with hope, with dread, and—ah, pity me for the dear mother’s sake, and answer the question I fear to speak.”

Gilbert was silent.

"Does he live?" she gasped, trembling.

Still no answer, and a big heart-bursting sob indicated the anguish the poor lady suffered.

"You went away with him," she cried piteously; "you went away with him—my husband—and you return alone."

"I bear a message from him," he said huskily.

"Then he lives," she cried, with a wild joy.

No answer.

"Ah, why are you silent when you know the anguish I endure until you speak?"

"When I saw Sir Walter last he was alive," was the evasive answer.

"When, where was that?"

"It was on the Field of Flodden, and he was fighting by the King's side."

"So long ago, so long ago," she moaned. "He must be dead, else would he have been here."

She spoke as if the chords of her heart

snapped with the words. The conviction against which she had struggled so long was slowly forcing itself upon her.

“Give me the message,” she said feebly, and closing her eyes as if she feared to look upon the messenger the while he delivered the last tidings she might ever receive from her husband.

They were moving with the best speed the horse could make along by the river-side through a densely wooded vale, which terminated at Merlin’s Cairn. The trees, gaunt and snow-whitened, cast grim shadows across their path, the wind swept the snow in white gusts before them, and the moon shone coldly down upon them.

Little Alice happily slept through it all.

“The struggle was nearly over,” Gilbert said, “and we were beginning to feel the truth forced upon us that we should bring no glory back to Scotland from Flodden Field, when I received your husband’s message. We had barely light enough to distinguish foe from friend when four men

with wisps of straw round the tops of their spears broke into the midst of the King's party. I did not see what followed. There was a sudden rush and a cry of—'Treachery, the King's betrayed.' I was unhorsed, but, gaining my feet, was about to spring forward to the spot where I had last seen the King, when my arm was grasped by Sir Walter.

"Speed you from the field," he said in a strange voice; "there is no hope here. Treason is rampant, and the day and our King are lost. If you have ever cared for me, or for the poor lass wearying for us yonder at Halstane, speed you to her. Give her this gauntlet, and tell her when she receives its neighbour she will know my fate."

"He gave me his left-hand gauntlet, and I have it here for you. I should have been with you many days ago; but I went to arrange the ransom of a prisoner; returning from our meeting place I was myself captured and carried to Newcastle.

There I have been detained till two days ago; and so hindered from serving you as I might have done had fortune brought me hither in better time. Here is the token from the dark field of Flodden."

The lady pressed the cold blood-stained gauntlet to her lips with a subdued joy. There was hope still.

"Did my husband say nothing more to you?" she inquired presently.

"Yes, he spoke a few words more—few words, but they conveyed a secret so terrible that, were it spoken aloud, all Scotland would rise to tear piecemeal the man who dared give it voice if he failed to prove its truth upon the accursed villain it accuses of the foulest crime."

He spoke with a feverish warmth, and his eyes glared as with fire.

His sudden change of manner alarmed the lady.

"Does it concern me?" she asked, wonderingly.

"Ay, you and I, and all of us in Scotland."

“Why keep it hidden, then?”

He bent his face close to hers as if fearing that the wind would catch his words and blow them through the land.

“*The King was betrayed into the hands of murderers.* Dare I proclaim that to our weeping country till I have found the means to lay the charge so safely on the villain’s shoulders that he shall have no loophole for escape? I dare not. But, while there is a gleam of life within me, I will follow him like a shadow until the hour comes when I can spring upon him, and, with all the strength of thirsty haste, avenge our King.”

“You know the man?”

“I do, and——”

He stopped abruptly, at the same time checking the horse.

They were at the foot of Merlin’s Cairn. The hill rose almost perpendicularly upon a base of rock. On the summit the moonlight showed the cairn, and on the brink of the precipice a small square house.

Half a dozen horsemen were descending the side of the opposite hill.

“By St. Mary, the moon betrays us,” muttered Gilbert beneath his breath. “Yonder is Tushielaw.”

“We are lost,” cried the lady, starting and trembling violently.

“They have not seen us yet.”

As he spoke Gilbert slipped from the saddle to the ground, leaving Lady Margaret still upon the horse.

“Ride, lady,” he said hastily; “ride for your life up this pass and gain the hut up yonder.”

Without giving her time to speak of her child he struck the horse smartly with his hand, and it bounded forward up the narrow pass which circled round the hill and conducted to the cairn.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE KNIGHT OF THE MASK.

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.”

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN the horse had borne the lady out of sight Gilbert Elliot turned to examine his position, and to calculate his chance of defence against the enemy.

Behind him rose the precipice of Merlin's Cairn, with its sharp jutting boulders snow-capped and frowning down upon him; on either side crags, furze, and skeleton trees; all white with snow. A few yards from his feet ran the river, and on the other side rose hill and forest. Close at hand Tushielaw and his half-dozen followers, proceeding

rapidly in the direction from which Lady Spens and her protector had just come.

His position was a good one ; for he stood upon a slight elevation, and the sharp crags which guarded the mouth of the pass would not permit two men to advance upon him together. But the disadvantage of the position was, that should any one get on to the crags behind him he could have little hope of saving himself, hampered as he was by the care of the gentle little Alice. He half repented now that he had not risked the delay of giving her to her mother, for he was in momentary dread that she would waken and attract the attention of the pursuers.

The child did waken at the sound of the borderers' voices as they passed.

"I'm cold, cold," the little one cried piteously.

"Whisht ye, whisht, my bairn," muttered Gilbert as softly as possible, watching the troopers intently the while.

The child was somehow frightened by the

voice, and somewhat, perhaps, by her inexplicable surroundings. She held her breath.

“They have heard nothing,” reflected Gilbert with a breath of relief, and he moved with the intention of proceeding up the pass.

He suddenly checked himself, for he observed that the horsemen had stopped in a body, and several had dismounted.

“They are tracking the horse’s footsteps in the snow,” he muttered between his clenched teeth, the while he grasped his lance firmly with one hand, and his heavy sword with the other.

His suspicion was presently confirmed. Three of the men retraced their way, watching the ground closely as they moved towards the pass where Elliot waited.

A shout from one of the men, and he knew that he was seen.

“And wha may ye be, in the deil’s name?” shouted Ding-a’-doon, who had been the first to observe him.

"There is no need that you should know," was the response.

"May be sae, may be sae, but gif I think I hae a richt to an answer that's anither affair. What's that on your back?"

"Nothing of yours."

"Ye'll no tell me?"

"No."

The brawny giant was about to try the effect of his Jeddart axe in obtaining a more satisfactory answer when Tushielaw stopped him.

"Never mind him, man," cried the chieftain gruffly, "follow the track of the horse."

"It has gone up the pass."

"Then go on."

"You cannot pass this way," said Gilbert, firmly.

Tushielaw looked up savagely.

"Who or what will stay us?"

"I will try."

"Down with the gowk," roared the borderer.

Ding-a'-doon swung his axe, in brisk

obedience to the command, as he leapt upon a crag. But as he leapt Gilbert struck him on the breast with his spear. Ding-a'-doon lost his balance and reeled backwards, knocking down the man behind him as he fell.

“Fiends burn you,” growled Tushielaw as he urged his horse forward.

He raised himself in the saddle that he might strike with greater force at the doughty keeper of the pass. Gilbert placed his spear against the rock, holding it firmly pointed towards his opponent's breast, while with a sweep of his sword he struck off the head of Tushielaw's axe. At the same time the spear caught a ring in his shirt of mail. Gilbert could not reach him with his sword, but he cut the horse's ear, and the animal sprang backward, throwing its rider violently to the ground.

Whereat the savage shouts and oaths of the troopers indicated how little mercy would be shown to the victor. Happily, a black mass of cloud covering the moon, cast

sudden darkness upon the glen, and considerably added to the confusion of the mosstroopers.

Gilbert took advantage of the darkness, and hurriedly made his way up the steep pass to the hut on Merlin's Cairn, which he entered with his little charge in safety. He was breathless when he thrust open the door, and he was somewhat astounded when, instead of finding himself in the presence of Kirsty Hyslop, he encountered a strange gentleman whose face was covered by a black mask. But he was too much concerned for the moment about the condition of Alice to pay any attention to this singular circumstance. He hastily placed the child in front of the peat fire, and patted her cold hands in order to arouse her from the state of semi-torpor into which she had fallen.

The house was neither large nor strong. It was built of stones clumsily stuck together; the roof was of thatch, and the door was composed of stout wattles. There

were two apartments—"a but and a ben"—with a square species of cupboard, built, like the walls, of stone, and placed close to the door of the inner chamber. The floor was earthen, and the furniture of the chamber, which Gilbert had entered, consisted principally of a couple of rude stools and a block of wood, which evidently served as a table or seat as might be required. Anything rather than a cheerful-looking place, certainly; but the peats which burned slowly on the floor were, on such a night, pleasant to see, even in this grim abode.

Presently Gilbert turned to seek Lady Spens. She was not in the chamber, but the man in the mask was gazing silently upon them.

Gilbert was about to inquire for her ladyship, but something in the position or bearing of this man arrested his tongue, while a strange feeling of mingled doubt and respect rose within him.

The man was rather above the average height, and of sinewy form. There was

nothing to indicate muscular strength, yet a certain dignity in the poise of the frame impressed the observer with a respect for which he could not readily find an explanation. His dress was entirely black, and somewhat of the English fashion, consisting of a short cloak of velvet, a loose jerkin of the same material, and silken hose. His head was covered by a black skull-cap, to which the mask was secured.

All this was sombre enough. Further, the absence of armour of any sort increased the singularity of his appearance, whilst his eyes shining out from the black mask obtained unusual brightness by their setting, and with somewhat of sadness in their expression, inspired confidence and yet aroused curiosity.

Whilst Gilbert was making these observations, little Alice was regaining warmth, and suddenly recalled her guardian to a consciousness of her presence.

“Mother, mother,” she sobbed.

Gilbert started, and the spell of fascina-

tion which had kept his eyes fixed upon the stranger was broken.

“Yes, yes—where is the lady?”

“The lady?” exclaimed the stranger, apparently unable to understand.

“Yes, the lady who came here but now—where is she?”

The evident surprise with which his inquiries were received alarmed Gilbert. Yet the path on which he had started the horse led straight to the hut, and the moon, which at that time had been shining clearly, must have afforded her sufficient light to see the way.

Something in the manner of the masked gentleman betokened emotion on his part also, as he answered—

“No one, save ourselves, is here.”

Gilbert sprang to his feet.

“Merciful powers—she has missed the way—perhaps fallen into the hands of her enemy.”

He rushed to the door, but abruptly stopped, and turned upon the stranger.

“ Our meeting has been a singular one, master ; but I must discover the fate of the lady at once, and I trust this child to your care until my return.”

The masked man bowed with a quiet dignity, as if accepting the trust imposed on him.

Gilbert passed forth, and from the height he caught a glimpse of Tushielaw’s party, as it disappeared through the glen.

They had failed to discover the manner of his escape—had given up the chase, perhaps, and were beating a retreat. So Gilbert thought, and the thought gave him some relief.

He hastened round to the pathway by which Lady Spens should have arrived at the cairn. He could find no traces of the horse’s footsteps until he was half-way down to the glen. There he was startled by finding the stone trodden down by the feet of several horses and men as if there had been a struggle of some sort on the spot. From this place he traced numerous

footprints down to the entrance of the pass which he had defended so faithfully, until, as he had thought, the lady was safe.

He was confused beyond measure by the fears which filled his mind. Her ladyship must have reached the cairn long before him had she proceeded thither as directed ; more than enough time had been allowed her. How then had she failed ? The truth flashed upon him with painful vividness, for it brought to him much self-reproach for his blindness. In order to secure her safety he had sent her away alone, whilst her child remained in danger. She must have dreaded the result of his contest with the pursuers, for her child's sake, and so turned back, but taking the wrong path, had missed him and fallen into the hands of Tushielaw.

Bitterly he upbraided himself for his ignorance of woman's nature in thinking that she would accept life for herself, and leave her child in peril. He had been blind and stupid.

But his was a nature prompt in decision, and he did not waste much time in vain regrets, but made speed back to the cairn house.

On entering he found the stranger seated on one of the rude stools with Aly—that was the pet name of little Alice—upon his knee. The two had evidently become the best of friends in spite of the black mask upon the man's face, which under ordinary circumstances would have rendered conciliation with the child impossible. Gilbert, however, was too deeply agitated to pay much heed to the matter.

“Well,” said the soft voice of the man of the Mask, looking up with earnest interest expressed in his eyes.

“She has been captured—she is in the power of a fiend.”

“You mean——”

“Tushielaw—the robber, traitor, and assassin.”

“That is a black list of crime.”

“And a true one. He is a villain so foul

that I think the fiends themselves must hate him."

"You are his enemy?"

"Ay, to the death."

"For what reason?"

"A great one, but one to which I dare not yet give voice."

"I will not press you for your secret; but in sooth there is cause enough for your enmity in the work he has done to-day."

"I see you are my friend," cried Gilbert, gladly, "and you will aid me."

The Mask shook his head sadly.

"I have little power, but with what I have I will aid you. What is your need?"

"First, protection for this child till I return."

"That, you know, she can have here. The woman Kirsty Hislop, the witch as she is called, is too much dreaded by the people for any to invade her home or to defy her power. Even Tushielaw's followers would not readily enter this hut. Besides,

she is my friend, and will guard this child from all danger, I pledge myself."

"Pardon, master," said Gilbert, still hesitating, "but I do not know your name; even your face is hidden from me. How can——"

He stopped, unwilling to complete the sentence.

"How can you trust me—is not that what you would say?"

Gilbert inclined his head.

"You must risk the trust. My face you may not see, for it is the face of one who is dead to the world. My name? I have none. Four months ago I bore a name as high and noble as any in all Scotland. To-day I am nameless. Why, I cannot tell you or any one."

There was a subdued sadness and earnestness in his tone which compelled the hearer to accept his words with faith.

"I will trust you," said Gilbert, moved by the generous impulse of youth; "but how shall I know you?"

“Call me the Chevalier Night, since all my life and hopes are darkened.”

“Yours is a strange humour, but I will not baulk it. Here is my hand. I will not seek to fathom the mystery which surrounds you or to discover aught you may wish to conceal, until you are willing to confide wholly in me.”

The Chevalier took the outstretched hand, the while his eyes seemed to search the inmost thoughts of the youth.

“For so much I thank you, Gilbert Elliot——”

“You know my name?”

“Yes, and I know too that you were a brave squire to one of the most faithful knights in your late King’s service.”

“Our late King—are you sure he is dead?”

“The world says so.”

Gilbert turned away his head, breathing heavily, and the Chevalier pressed his hand as if in sympathy with his grief.

“But we will not speak of him now,” continued the latter, with a slight tremor in his voice. “Tell me of your family.”

“I have none. All that I am I owe to Sir Walter Spens, who found me friendless, and became almost a father to me. All that I hope to be I will owe to a strong arm and a good sword.”

“And a generous heart. Well, perhaps I will be able to help you forward more than you think. We shall see. For the present I will secure the safety of the child. What other need have you?”

“Procure me a horse.”

“There is one at hand.”

“That is all I seek. For the rest, I will rescue Lady Spens or die. Stay, there is one favour more.”

“Let me know it.”

“Should I fail to return here in three days, or to send for the child, will you get her conveyed to the Queen?”

The Chevalier started, but instantly resumed his quiet imperturbable manner.

“I will see that your wish is obeyed.”

“A thousand thanks. And now farewell till we meet again.”

“That may be soon.”

“I pray that it may be, for then my lady will be safe.”

There was a timid knock at the door, and when it was opened Andrew Howie, looking pale and frightened, entered hesitatingly. He was acquainted with the reputed character of the woman who dwelt here, he was alarmed by the singular appearance of the Chevalier Night, and nothing but his dread of being bewitched or cursed in some way prevented him refusing bluntly to leave Aly in such dangerous keeping. As it was, he mumbled a good deal in a shy scared way. He wished to stay, and yet he wished to accompany Gilbert, for he had seen Tushielaw and his party passing down the Yarrow side with the captured lady. At length he decided to accompany Gilbert, and the two speedily set out upon the ex-

pedition, leaving little Aly to the care of the strange Chevalier in the house of Kirsty Hyslop, who was known as the Witch of Merlin's Cairn.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE REVEL AT TUSHIELAW.

“Hark the loud revel wakes again  
To greet the leader of the train.  
Behold the group by the pale lamp—

By what strange features vice hath known  
To single out and mark her own.”

ROKEBY.

RISING upon a declivity from the banks of the Ettrick water at its junction with the Raukle Burn stood the tower of Tushielaw. A grim, bare, and strong fortress, every stone of which might have borne testimony to some special outrage.

Had light and noisy mirth been capable of conferring any degree of geniality upon the tower, there was enough of both upon the second night after the raid of Halstane

to have given it as hospitable an appearance as ever weary wayfarer might wish to see.

The raid had been a lucky one, and so revel ran high in the great hall of Tushielaw. Fatted oxen had been roasted whole, and with the help of Selkirk bannocks had formed the substantial portion of a rare feast. Then good strong ale flowed freely, the dice rattled, the joke passed, and the laugh rang loudly against the walls. Louder than the loudest rang the hoarse laugh of Gilpin Horner, as, perched upon the table, with legs crossed tailorwise, he watched the play between Ding-a'-doon, Eddie Craig, and Yetholm Will.

The dwarf, being allowed considerable freedom of speech, was never slow to make a jest at the expense of any of his comrades; but he seemed to take special delight in turning the laugh against the chief's foster-brother. Little men generally envy tall ones their height; and possibly Hornie felt most pleasure in attacking the giant because he had a spite against his superior length.

At all events, the two were always quarrelling, or rather, Hornie was always goading Ding-a'-doon into a passion.

With a slow, surly, drunken air Ding-a'-doon threw the dice, and twice he lost.

"Eh, what a big head and what awfu' wee wits," croaked the dwarf; "I wouldna gie muckle for your share o' yesterday's wark, my braw big Pate."

Big Pate scowled at him, but said nothing until he lost again, when he gave vent to his vexation in an oath.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Hornie; "let me play for ye, man, or ye'll no hae a bodle's worth left."

"I'll ding the head aff ye if ye speak again," growled Ding-a'-doon.

"It's sae muckle better nor your ain that ye'd maybe like the lend o't."

Pate was in a rage, and what with his losses and the laugh his comrades took at his expense, he had some cause. So he up with his sledge-hammer fist and aimed a blow at his tormentor. Whereupon Hornie,

with an impish skirl of glee, threw up his legs, received the blow on the softest part of his body, and rolled heels over head from the table to the floor, his gymnastics affording merriment to the company, and still further enraging his gigantic enemy.

“Hoots, man, let the deil mind his ain bairn,” suggested Yetholm Will; “and ye come finish our game.”

Sulkily the offended Ding-a'-doon complied with the request of his friend; and presently becoming interested forgot the dwarf. The latter had remained singularly quiet under the table, and those who observed the circumstance concluded that some mischief was going forward. When Hornie reappeared there was a wicked leer in his eyes, corroborative of the suspicion.

“That’s five for me,” cried Pate, who fancied his luck was returning, and was jubilant accordingly.

“He’s no playin’ fair,” shouted Hornie, whose big head just appeared above the board as he was standing on the floor.

Pate started at the sound of his tormentor's voice.

“Haud your chaff, Hornie, or I'll clip the tongue o' ye, though I would nae like to mar sic a puir wee wretch.”

Here the dwarf was hit upon his vulnerable part; for, singular enough, the one thing he could not bear to be jested about was his deformity.

“Big Pate would hae stuck i' the Tarass Moss the ither day if I hadna pitied him and pu'ed him out, puir soul, for his long legs dinna carry muckle wit.”

Pate shook his fist at him.

“Gif I get my hands on ye——”

“Would ye fecht?—come on.”

And seizing a Jeddart axe, which was twice as long as himself, Hornie made sundry brave gesticulations; and, making a feint across the board of tilting at Ding-a'-doon, he upset that worthy's horn of ale. Pate sprung up and made a rush to get round the table. But in jumping up his chair mysteriously jumped with him, got

between his legs, and sent him sprawling upon the floor. He lay kicking and cursing loud and furiously, the while his comrades laughing loudly released his leg from the chair, to which it had been tied by the dwarf.

“Haw, haw, haw!” bellowed the latter, as, climbing upon the shoulders of the man nearest to him, he stretched out his long arms, gripped one of the crossbeams of the roof, and easily swung himself on to it and out of harm’s way.

When Ding-a’-doon regained his feet Hornie had disappeared. Then the dice rattled, and the revel proceeded madly as ever.

Shortly before this brawl occurred two seats at the head of the board had been vacated. They were those of Tushielaw and Simon, the priest, who had proceeded to another apartment where they could confer in privacy. The chamber was a small one, and formed as it were an ante-room to the great hall.

Here Mess Simon was seated before a blazing wood fire, which sparkled and crackled right merrily, and lightened the gloomiest corners of the dingy chamber. On the table beside him was a flagon of mulled wine; his bald head shone in the firelight, and his face seemed to glow with beneficence, the while an occasional gleam of cunning flashed in his eyes and disappeared before its meaning could be caught.

Tushielaw paced the floor with a heavy sullen air, his face flushed, and his eyes full of passion.

"I have reasons, Mess Simon, I have reasons for all that I do, be you sure of that," he said in a thick voice.

"Ah, that's what you say."

And Simon smacked his lips as if he would have said something very different, had he thought it expedient.

Tushielaw stopped abruptly before him, and, scowlingly—

"Do you doubt it?"

“A little perhaps.” (Here the cunning gleam flashed in his eyes. Was he trying to fathom the motive of his master?)

“Wherefore? Do you think I would risk so much as I have risked without some sure gain in view?”

Mess Simon put on an expression of profound meditation.

“Hum—that is not so readily answered. I take it for granted that you had some good gain in view when you sold your service to Surrey, and——”

“Curse you—be silent,” interrupted Tushielaw with feverish haste, and looking about uneasily; “by my hand, you speak with as little heed as if there were no more danger in your words than in bidding me a blessing or a penance.”

“No one can hear us.”

“No matter; when you speak of—my contract” (the words came with some little difficulty), “speak in whispers; for, were it known, there’s not a man in Scotland or on the border whose hand would not be raised against me.”

“As you will, then: we will let that bird fly. We shall say that for certain service rendered to a gentleman you are to be placed in possession of a treasure which will make you rich for life. Why not be satisfied with the fortune you have won, and seek some other land where you can enjoy it in safety?”

“I cannot leave the border,” was the morose answer. “I should die, I think, were my back turned on Tushielaw and its mad revels. Besides—besides, I must have excitement—I must be in the saddle, sword in hand, men at my back, and stiff work to do in order to forget that accursed contract.”

“So that’s the reason why you make a raid upon Halstane and carry off the woman you had most need to propitiate.”

Tushielaw struck the table fiercely with his hand.

“Zounds, man, is it not because I must have her friendship that I have brought her hither?”

“ Oh, that is your way of making friends.”

“ I had no other means. Think you, had I presented myself to her and humbly prayed that she would forget my black repute, forget my enmity to her husband, and accept me as her friend and guardian, that she would have smiled and given me her hand? Do you think that likely?”

“ Well, no, not very likely.”

“ Why, very well, then, what else had I to do but bring her here and make her my wife whether she will or no.”

“ Your wife?” (this with a slight start).

“ Ay, my wife—is that very strange?”

“ No—here is your health, and a prosperous wooing.”

There was a peculiarity in the manner of Mess Simon at this juncture—there was a certain darkness in his eyes and a certain nervous movement about the hands and mouth suggestive of agitation from some inexplicable cause; agitation, too, which all his affected good humour was not sufficient to conceal for the moment.

Tushielaw, however, was too full of passion to observe any nice changes of temperament.

“ Wooing ? ” he said contemptuously ; “ certes, there will be little of that. Two days ago she was at Halstane, to-night she is in Tushielaw. If she refuse me now I can bide a while, and, if need be, why, you can wed us at any moment, and take nay for yea.”

The friar laughed, his eyes twinkled cunningly ; and, raising his goblet, he said suggestively—

“ Ah, but suppose I were afflicted with some stupid humour and were to accept nay for nay ? ”

Tushielaw leaned over the table and scanned the man’s face narrowly. Not a muscle moved. Then, slowly—

“ The man who would possess the title and lands of the Earl of Binram must have my good-will, you see ? ”

Simon nodded carelessly and drained his cup.

There was a heavy thud on the door, which was immediately opened partially, and the big red head of Hornie thrust in.

“Can I come in?” he said, attempting to lower his loud voice.

Permission to enter being gruffly granted, the dwarf opened the door sufficiently to let his body pass in, and instantly closed it again. There was a comical air of mystery in the movements of the deformed creature, which afforded mirth to the jovial friar; but none to the gloomy chief, who watched Hornie scowlingly.

“Does your inside ache, or have your heels been clipped, that you tread so gawkily on your toes?” he growled.

The dwarf grinned broadly.

“Neither ane nor ither fashes me,” he said, with the same effort as before to subdue his voice, “but there’s a braw bird just flown richt intil the falcon’s claws.”

“What is he?”

“A packman body making his way frae Carlisle to Selkirk. He has lost his road,

and cam' up the tower seeking shelter for the night and some ane to put him straight i' the mornin'. I dinna ken what his pack has in't, but I'se warrant it's a weel-stuffed ane."

"Where is he?"

"Wi' the bairns ben the house, drinking and supping and making himsel' at hame, poor soul."

"Send him to the rook's nest—he must pay toll before he leaves us. Let Ding-a'-doon see to it."

Hornie, grinning and nodding his big head knowingly, returned to the hall. The packman—a middle-aged man, with very bushy beard, whiskers, and moustache, a greyish skull-cap, and clothes of stout but common stuff—was seated below the salt busy eating and drinking with apparent relish. To him, the dwarf—

"Tushielaw, King of the Borders, bids me say ye shall hae a clean bed o' reeds for the nicht and a help on your road the morn."

The packman, with an air of exceeding humility and gratitude, acknowledged the message, and proceeded with his supper.

When Tushielaw and the friar were left together, the latter carelessly took the word, peering regretfully into his empty flagon the while—

“You have resolved, then, come weal, come woe, she shall be your wife.”

“I have said it; and, set all else aside, there is that here”—he beat his breast fiercely—“there’s that here burning hotly as an armourer’s forge that impels me to it. The black fiend himself and all his imps seem dragging me towards her, and leaving me no choice.”

“When shall it be?”

Tushielaw answered decisively—

“To-night.”

Simon looked up surprised.

“Eh?—that is to say—to-night, perhaps.”

“You shall see.”

The other nodded doubtingly.

Tushielaw snatched up the cruzie which

stood in a niche of the wall, and without speaking again passed through a small side door into an arched passage, at the end of which was the entrance to the prison chamber of Lady Spens.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE RIGHT-HAND GAUNTLET.

“ The Lady Jean she thocht it sair  
That she should see her love nae mair.”

*Kinmat.*

THE chamber in which Lady Margaret was confined was perhaps the most comfortable in the tower. It was small and circular in shape. The walls were hung with rich hangings of various ill-assorted colours. The bad taste displayed in this, however, did not trouble the master. He had obtained the materials in the course of different raids over the borders, and he had neither leisure nor inclination to be nice in his selection. They served all his purpose in giving to the appearance of the

chamber a certain degree of comfort. The floor was strewn with dried reeds, and a bright fire aided a richly ornamented cruzie to light the chamber. A massive bedstead, a table, and chairs formed the principal pieces of furniture.

Some effort had been made to render the chamber fit for the occupation of a lady ; and had the heart been well, there was no reason why the present occupant should not have been as happy there as at Halstane, or in the more luxurious chambers of the palace at Edinburgh. But the heart was not well, and so all else was worthless. She was bewildered by her capture, and tortured beyond measure by her ignorance of the fate of her child, and of her stout champion and good friend Gilbert Elliot. That they had been taken, too, she did not doubt ; that one or both of them had been slain, she feared. She had been permitted no opportunity to resolve her doubt, for from the moment she had been escorted to this chamber by Tushielaw, she had been

visited only by a young girl who was as silent as a mute. But even this creature she had only seen thrice, when food was brought to her—food which remained scarcely tasted. Over-fatigue and lack of food left her very weak; and although she had slept eight or ten hours, her nervous system was strung to that pitch which overlooks the gulf of insanity, and so intensified her agony.

Thinking of her child, all consciousness of her own position was lost. She had no sense of peril to herself, her heart was so full of anguish for the little one who was so much more precious to her than life.

She waited and wearied through the long hours, with heavy beating pulse, for some one to come who would tell her ever so little about her child. Now and again she heard the distant sound of some loud burst of coarse laughter that made her shudder as with cold. Then she would turn her eyes to the small grated window, and listening to the shrill cries of the wind as it swept round

the tower, she thought the elements out there—the sharp wind, the white drift, and the rushing waters—were less fearful than the human beings by whom she was surrounded.

She almost prayed for the appearance of the man to whom she owed her great misery.

At last he came.

His dark countenance was flushed with drink or passion, and his piercing eyes burned as if with fire, but his bearing was that of a strong man whose whole strength is used to appear cool and respectful.

Lady Spens half rose from her seat as he entered. A repugnance, deeper than she had ever known before, filled her at sight of him.

When he approached, and set the light he carried upon the table, she sunk back upon her seat.

“You will pardon the lack of ceremony with which I visit you, madam,” he said, his hard voice a little unsteady at first,

“when you know the import of my visit.”

“You come to speak to me of my child?” she cried eagerly.

Tushielaw’s brows contracted.

“Of her partly,” he responded slowly.

He did not dare to raise his face to the inquiring eyes of the mother.

“Is she here, is she safe, shall I see her?” she queried breathlessly.

He grasped the wrist of his left hand with his right, and stood with an air of dogged resolution gazing upon the floor.

“Before I answer you must hear and answer me.”

“I will answer nothing until I know that she is safe.”

A momentary silence. Then—

“This much I will tell you and no more—her safety, her life or death, rests with you.”

“With me?—ah, then, she is safe.”

And the poor lady turned away her face to hide its tearful gratitude to the world’s Guardian.

A callous smile passed over the man's countenance.

"That is kindly spoken, lady, and emboldens me to make known the purpose of my presence the more freely."

Something in his hard voice startled her, perplexed her, and caused her to turn quickly and regard him inquiringly.

"Your purpose?"

He inclined his head stiffly.

"I have a purpose, and a grave one, else you can divine I should not have troubled myself so much to bring you hither."

"I listen," she said coldly, the while her heart throbbed with a new undefinable terror.

"Good. Then, first I pray you to remember that when I waited upon you at Halstane you refused to receive me."

"I remember."

"Can you credit," he proceeded, with subdued voice, "that it was for your sake I persisted so roughly in forcing myself upon you?"

“Tushielaw is not reputed a man of much delicacy in these matters,” she returned bitterly.

“No, he is reputed, I hope, a man of strong arm and strong will. But for once he made a raid for the sake of another than himself or any of his clan.”

“Another’s sake?”

“Yes, yours.”

“Mine. The good intention was somewhat rudely hidden.”

“But a kindly intent it was none the less. You refused to see me; it was necessary for your sake, and for the sake of all you care most about, that I should see you and speak with you. It was to save your life that I forced my way into your home, pursued you when you fled from me, and carried you hither.”

“To save my life?”

“Yes, and your child’s.”

“I cannot read your riddle.”

“I will help you. Your husband has been accused of treason to his King at Flodden.”

“ Then the accuser lies,” she cried with sudden energy. “ His heart is too loyal, his soul too noble, to hold one treasonable thought.”

Tushielaw shrugged his shoulders, and bowed his head deprecatingly.

“ None of that will I gainsay, but ”—his voice was here lowered to a hissing whisper—“ a secret commission held in Edinburgh was satisfied that his guilt was even blacker than I have stated it, and as his body could not be found, condemned him to be gibbeted and quartered in effigy.”

“ Oh, sacred mother ! does this man speak true ? ” moaned the lady, covering her face with her hands, and shuddering ; “ has this been done and no voice raised to defend the honour of the loyalest knight in Scotland ? ”

“ He was a favourite of our dead King, and he had many enemies,” Tushielaw proceeded coolly. “ But their wrath did not stop at this—— ”

“ What more had they the power to do ? ” she sobbed bitterly.

“They had the power to confiscate his lands, to confer them upon one whom they favoured——”

“The foul black liar who has defamed my husband, I well believe.”

“I will not say. But they have confiscated his lands, and more—six days ago a warrant was issued for your arrest.”

“I will go to them at once; my voice at least will defend the truth of my absent lord,” she cried, springing to her feet.

“Think you they will credit you? They will torture you in the hope of wrenching from your agony the confession of the conspiracy, and the revelation of all its secrets.”

“I will go, I will go at once, and Heaven will give me strength to endure all the torture wherewith they may test me—to endure it even to death, and I will die with the assertion upon my lips that Walter Spens was true.”

“They would not believe you.”

“But the people will when they learn what I have suffered.”

“The people believe him guilty. They would learn nothing of your fate, and so your sacrifice is useless.”

“No matter, I will go to them now.”

“And leave your child friendless and a beggar?”

With a low moan of anguish she sunk back upon the chair, and for the moment her pain dulled all sense of the place and of her companion's presence.

Tushielaw bent over her and took her hand. She snatched it away from him shudderingly.

“You would not do that,” he whispered, and the same callous smile as before passed over his face, “and soothely there is no need; the remedy for all your sorrow is at hand.”

“Oh, what remedy is left to me?” she sobbed.

“Fortune and safety from your enemies for yourself, fortune and happiness for your child.”

“There can be no happiness for wife or

child whilst his name is so black in the eyes of his country.”

“ Means shall be found to wipe the stain away.”

“ How, how ? ” she cried with passionate eagerness.

“ Through me,” he answered boldly. “ Become mistress of Tushielaw, and all that I have promised shall be accomplished.”

“ Never ! ” She checked herself, and said more calmly, “ My husband still lives.”

Tushielaw started as with some sudden fear. Then—

“ Tush—your husband is dead : I myself saw him fall.”

“ He sent to me this token that he lives,” she said faintly, as she produced the gauntlet Gilbert Elliot had given her.

“ Then be this the token of his death,” said Tushielaw, as he threw upon the table the right-hand gauntlet of Sir Walter Spens.

There was a long weary pause the while the unhappy wife’s eyes gazed hopelessly

upon the fatal token, and the suitor watched her narrowly.

By-and-by, with a weary helpless voice and manner—

“Go away,” she said feebly, “go away from me and let me think.”

“Your answer.”

“I cannot answer now—go away.”

He hesitated, he regarded her deathly white face, and suddenly snatching up the light he had brought with him, turned upon his heel and quitted the chamber.

These were bitter tidings she had received: her husband dead, his name dishonoured in the eyes of the world, almost beyond the possibility of redemption: her own life and that of her child in peril—how was she to prove the dead knight's truth and save her child?

She did not know, and she sat there in silent anguish staring at the dread token which ground all hope to dust.

There was a curious noise upon the window as if some one were trying to open

it. It was curious, because the window was high above the ground, from which it could not be reached without the aid of a ladder. The noise, however, continued, and by-and-by attracted her attention. She looked up wonderingly.

“Lady Margaret.”

Her name was pronounced by a voice that sent a wild thrill of hope through her heart.

She sprang to the window, and reaching it with the help of a chair she threw it open. Outside the iron bars she saw a man hanging by a rope as if he had descended by it from the roof.

It was the packman to whom Tushielaw had given shelter.

At sight of the strange face with its profusion of coarse hair outside the window, she drew back startled.

The packman, holding the rope which supported him in his dangerous position firmly with one hand, drew the other across his face, slightly moving his beard and

whiskers. With a subdued cry of joy, the lady recognized him.

“Gilbert.”

She thrust her hand through the grating, and he touched it respectfully with his lips.

“Courage, dear lady, courage,” he said, his voice tremulous with emotion; “I come to save you—to restore you to your child.”

“Ah, my bairn—is she safe?”

“Safe and well.”

“Then you were not captured?”

“No, I escaped them, thinking you were out of danger. Discovering my error I followed you hither, obtained entrance in disguise, and was sent to the chamber above this one to rest for the night. I filed the bars of the window, and with this rope and our holy mother’s help have been able to reach you.”

She looked around hopelessly.

“But can your presence serve me? Alas, no.”

“It can, it can—but stay: let me look into your face.”

She raised her eyes to his.

The confidence and resolution expressed in his look gave her new courage. With such a devoted friend as this at hand she felt that escape was possible, although at present she could not imagine by what means it might be effected.

“If you can risk your life in my hands I may save you.”

“I am ready,” was the firm response.

“Then watch you the door and give me timely notice if any one approaches.”

“What are you about to do?”

“To break your prison bars; then with this rope, your life dependent on my arms, we will reach the ground. Not far hence Andrew waits with horses, and we can be far upon the road to safety before your absence is discovered. Do not speak more now, for every instant is precious.”

She obeyed, and passing over to the door remained there listening. He produced a strong armourer’s file, and, still hanging by the rope, began to work upon the centre bar

of the grating. His was a strong hand; and it was doubly strong now, for it was inspired by the grateful and affectionate memories of a noble heart. So he worked cautiously and stoutly, forgetful of the abyss beneath his feet, and that the slightest relaxation of his hold upon the rope would hurl him into the jaws of death.

The wind, cold and keen, whistled by him and around the tower as he worked, and its shrill cries deadened the grating sound of the file.

Gilbert, having played the part of pack-man in the hall with so much discretion that even Tushielaw had not had any suspicion of a trick, was conducted by Yetholm Will to the chamber—or rather cupboard—which had been called the rook's nest. The name was given to it on account of its proximity to the roof; and indeed a dozen respectable crows would have filled it nicely.

There was barely room enough for a man of average height to lie down straight. It was square, the roof low, and the light-hole

—it could not be called a window—not more than two feet square. There was a stone seat in a recess of the wall, a small table, and a bundle of dried reeds at one side. The light-hole was crossed by one strong iron bar; the walls were naked and cold-looking, and the atmosphere of the nest was that of a prison.

“This is your kennel, frien’,” said Will, about to close the door. “Gude nicht.”

“An’ a soun’ sleep till ye,” bellowed the big voice of the dwarf from the dark passage. “If ye hae a mind to flee awa’ afore mornin’, ye can jist drap out o’ the hole, and ye’ll gang doon at a fine rate, I’s e warrant ye. Haw, haw—ho!”

“Thanks, frien’s, but I’m owre wearied to try tricks o’ thet sort,” said the feigned packman.

The red head of the dwarf appeared between the legs of Yetholm Will.

“Gif ye should try it,” cried Hornie, “ye’ll pass the roun’ chamber on the road, whar ye can look in an’ see the bonny bird——”

“Haud your daumed tongue,” cried Will, catching the little man by the neck and dragging him away.

Gilbert heard the stout oaken door locked, and the hoarse laugh of Hornie as the two descended to the hall.

He lost no time in preparing for the accomplishment of his purpose. He opened the pack which had tempted the cupidity of the borderers, and took out of it a long rope. He secured the pack again, and immediately tested the strength of the iron bar across the light-hole: it was strong enough to sustain thrice his weight without bending. With his poignard and the file he removed the bar from its sockets, secured the rope to it, and then mounting upon the table squeezed himself through the hole feet foremost.

Clinging to the mason-work, and, without once looking downward, he placed the bar across the hole inside and then trusted himself to the descent.

But he had little more than discovered

the window he risked so much to discover when the lock of the door of the rook's nest was stealthily turned. A pause, and, after, the door was slowly pushed open. There was no light to show by whom the door had been opened, or to reveal that the rook had taken wing.

The stealthy comer groped about the chamber and presently overturned the table. Whereat the voice of Ding-a'-doon sung out gruffly—

“What's the gowk doin' ?”

“There's something wrang,” answered Yetholm Will, “for there's naebody here.”

An oath from Pate, and a light was procured by Eddie Craig. They saw at once what had happened, and Hornie came rolling up the stairs in time to laugh at their confusion.

“He has left the pack, though,” the dwarf said, with a cunning leer in his strange eyes.

“An' that's a' we want,” added Eddie Craig, as he proceeded to break open the packman's store.

The pack was found to be of stronger stuff than they had expected, and they were occupied several minutes in forcing it open. That done, the contents were revealed.

A number of stones, and a quantity of small sticks and furze !

Ding-a'-doon swore ; Eddie and Will looked as if they had been cheated out of fair spoil ; and Hornie sat upon the worthless pack, laughing as if it had been a capital joke.

There was a rush to the light-hole. The rope was discovered to be heavy, as with the weight of a man.

" Deevil confound him ; he'll pay for the trick," growled Pate.

With a few swift crosses of his knife, he cut the rope from its fastening. The iron bar fell inward ; the rope went down, and the three men grinned with satisfaction.

" We'll gang doon and see what's come o' him," said Pate, with much the same tone as that with which an ordinary man might have asked a friend out for an evening stroll, only much gruffer.

As the men were passing from the compartment there was a sharp whistle. Pate wheeled about, and saw Hornie swinging on the ledge of the light-hole by his long arms.

“What are ye whistling for, Beelzebub?”

“The ghaist o’ the packman, Clootie,” returned the dwarf promptly.

A queer expression of half rage, half fear, passed over the countenance of Ding-a’-doon. Then, after a moment’s hesitation, he followed his companions, leaving Hornie in darkness.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE PACKMAN AND THE FRIAR.

“ I curse and blame generally  
All them that love in villane,  
For villanie makith villaine,  
And by his dedes a chorle is seine.  
These villains arme without pite,  
Friendship, and love, and all bounte.”

*Romaunt of the Rose.*

GILBERT had escaped the destruction intended for the packman. He had succeeded in filing through the centre bar, and just when the rope was cut he had laid hold of another bar in order to wrench the centre one from the upper socket in the masonry. By this lucky movement he was saved, and when the rope came tumbling about his shoulders he understood

that his escape from the nest had been discovered.

Then he heard the dwarf's whistle, and he seemed to accept it as a warning; for he thereupon exerted his utmost strength to wrench off the bar he had broken. He succeeded, drew himself up, and, panting with his effort, rested upon the ledge of the window.

He coiled up the rope, and in doing so peered down from his eyrie into the abyss from which he had so narrowly escaped. The gloom which hung over the fosse added to the appearance of its depth, and made the sight one to quicken the pulse of the bravest heart, and to wring from it a prayer of thanks to Heaven for its mercy.

Another whistle: this time from below.

Gilbert sprung into the chamber and hastily closed the sash.

Lady Margaret observed his movements with bewildered curiosity.

"Is all hope lost?" she whispered, breathless.

“Not yet—we are only interrupted.

“It is—it is all lost,” she moaned, starting. “The noise of your entrance has been heard—Tushielaw is returning.”

Gilbert clutched the iron bar fiercely, as if his first thought had been to meet the Border Chief with that weapon. But the remembrance of his helplessness against the combined forces of Tushielaw caused him to cast the first thought from him at once. His life was precious for his lady’s sake.

“Courage and be calm,” he whispered, as he glided behind one of the hangings, carefully taking with him the rope coiled round his arm, and the bar of iron.

The hangings had scarcely ceased to rustle, Lady Margaret had scarcely reached a seat, when the door opened, and Simon the friar entered, with his cowl drawn over his head.

His demeanour had not its ordinary jovial swagger; his gait was steadier—more polite, one would say—and there was apparent

more than the usual degree of cunning in his smile.

Thus, then, he advanced to her ladyship, who regarded him with amaze, and a degree of instinctive fear. This latter sentiment checked all the pleasure she might have felt in seeing one of his holy office in that place, for it dispelled all the hope of assistance from his hands she might have entertained.

“*Salve*, daughter,” said the friar, raising his hand gently.

She bowed her head to the benediction, rising at the same time from her chair.

“You are weakly, daughter; retain your seat there, whilst I try to comfort you in your distress.”

There was a certain kindness in his tone which, together with the character of his office, was gradually overcoming her first impression.

“Alas, father, what comfort can you give me here?”

“Is the place so hateful to you, then?”

“Need you ask?”

“I could not know else. But being so, take comfort in the knowledge that you will be free to leave it soon.”

“Free? When?”

“Two hours hence.”

She was about to throw herself at his feet to give him thanks, when she met his cold eyes glistening watchfully out from beneath his cowl. She checked herself, for the eyes recalled an indistinct memory that chilled her heart. She pressed her hand upon her brow bewilderedly.

He observed her hesitation, and spoke as if offended—

“Do you doubt me—do you doubt the Church of which I am an unworthy but faithful servant?”

“No, no, no, I do not—I dared not doubt that; but——”

“But you doubt me. I am sorry, daughter; and the more so, for that I cannot serve you since you will not trust me.”

“I will—I will trust you,” she cried falteringly; and fearing to lose help, the extent of which she could not divine, she promised trust, even when her heart doubted most.

“I am glad of that. Now you will hear me.”

“I am waiting, you cannot know with how much anxiety, to know the full meaning of your words. You said I should be free.”

“And you shall be, when you are mistress of Tushielaw.”

She drew back with a cry of pain and repugnance.

“Ah, sir, it does not become you to mock at misery.”

“Soh! you do not like the union. Well, I can save you.”

“You can?”

“And will; but first let me deliver my commission. The Master of Tushielaw sent me to you to bid you prepare for a hasty espousal in the chapel of the Tower two hours hence.”

“And in that time you have promised to set me free?”

“I have promised, and will observe my word; but you must be prepared to trust me wholly, and in return to serve one who is near to you.”

He bent slightly towards her as he spoke, his eyes fixed searchingly upon her, and with, as it seemed, altogether more eagerness in his manner than the occasion demanded.

“One who is near to me,” she said, trying to make out his meaning.

“Yes, daughter, one who is near and dear to you, I trust,” he rejoined, fingering the cords of his gown nervously; and added hastily, as if afraid of being misunderstood or understood too well, “I speak in sweet charity’s name, my daughter.”

“I do not understand.”

“I will be plain, then. It becomes my office, so far as my frail power can go, to be a peacemaker; and surely it is well to be the maker of peace, the healer of dis-

sension between those whom ties of kindred and blood should bind together in this world in unity. I speak, lady, of your brother."

She turned away her face, which crimsoned as with shame.

"You mean my father's son," she said, huskily.

"And your brother; although not born of one mother, the kinship is binding in the eyes of the Church; and in the Church's name I charge you cast away all malice."

She turned to him with a proud sad look.

"He whom you call my brother has sinned so deeply that he is an outcast in the eyes of all men. My father dying cursed him; he was my husband's enemy, and therefore mine, and withal I yearn towards him and pity him. Were he near me I would shun him, for I fear him. But could my poor strength help him to a better life you would see how gladly I

should serve him. This is not malice, father."

The friar spoke hastily, lowering his voice to a whisper.

"A new, a better life is before him—you and you only can help him to it—will you refuse?"

"Show me the means," she said, warmly.

"You shall hear. But be not startled, strange as my proposition may appear.

"I listen."

"Tushielaw—he who would make you his wife—holds your brother so strongly in his grasp that he cannot escape him, cannot hope to rise above the mire of perdition into which he has sunk till you stretch forth your hand and lift him up. Will you refuse?"

"Show me the means," she repeated, firmly.

"Haste, then, to place your brother in position to defy his evil master; you must to-night in seeming—only in seeming, remember—give your hand to Tushielaw."

With a subdued cry she shrunk back. He continued quickly—

“I shall perform the ceremony, but in such wise that it will place no bond upon you. You will not refuse?”

She covered her face with her hands, affrighted as much by the strange eagerness of the friar as by his proposition.

“Oh, I cannot, I cannot do this,” she sobbed. “It would be blasphemy.”

“I will absolve you. Remember, it is to serve your brother.”

Bewildered and affrighted she cowered down, unable to answer; and during the anxious pause a half-stifled sigh was heard in the room.

The friar glanced quickly around, and saw the hangings rustle.

Lady Margaret looked at him with a resolute dignity expressed upon her troubled countenance.

“Even to save him, I cannot peril my own soul.”

“Think, think again, and remember all that depends upon your answer.”

"I remember all, and I have answered."

"Is there no gleam of memory, of pity, of love, to make you risk so little to gain so much?"

"I will not consent to this."

"Then blame yourself for all that follows," he cried angrily, as he clutched her by the wrist and attempted to drag her from the room.

The hangings were torn asunder, and Gilbert Elliot stood between the friar and the door.

There was a moment of hesitation and surprise. Then Mess Simon drew the lady quickly behind him, and taking from beneath the folds of his clerkly gown a poignard, sprang with the swiftness of a tiger upon the champion. The latter, however, stepped nimbly aside and tripped his assailant, who fell heavily to the ground.

Gilbert swung the iron bar he had wrenched from the window above his head, and in his passion would have

despatched Mess Simon without any questioning had not Lady Spens thrown herself before him with a cry of horror.

In the scuffle the cowl had fallen from the friar's head, and something she observed in the strange face of the man made her his protector in this moment of peril.

"No, no, no," she cried wildly, "do not *you* strike *him*."

A minute Gilbert hesitated, then quietly obeyed. He lowered his weapon to the ground.

"You protect him?" he said, wondering.

"Yes, yes; but do not ask me why. Let us away at once, if you have still the means of escape."

"I will not question since it is your wish, and since delay spoils all. I think the coast is clear now down yonder, and we can go. But first we will make this ruffian harmless.

The friar had been partly stunned by his fall, and Gilbert without difficulty

bound his wrists and feet securely together. That done, he tore a strip of cloth from one of the hangings, and stuffed it into the mouth of his late assailant. Then, moving rapidly and stealthily, he piled the chairs against the door. Next, he tied an end of the rope to one of the massive bedposts; and again secured the rope to the bar of iron, so that the latter should catch in the masonry of the window.

Thus, having made doubly sure of the fastenings, he placed the table beneath the window, and, after extinguishing the cruzie, he peered out into the night.

He descried only darkness and the glimmering snow; he heard no sound save that of the wind and the running waters beneath.

He threw the rope down, and turned to the lady. Pallid as the snow without, and with a world of anguish expressed upon her face, she was kneeling beside the prostrate friar, gazing upon him piteously.

A shade of doubt passed over Gilbert's face, and there was a degree of displeasure in his tone as he said abruptly—

“Now, lady, I am ready—our lives depend upon our speed.”

With a peculiar solemnity of manner, she touched the friar's brow. The latter, returning slowly to consciousness, fixed his heavy eyes upon her, with a cruel smile of hate. She drew away from him, and placed her trembling hand in Gilbert's. He grasped it with anxious eagerness, and, raising her in his arms, stepped lightly upon the table, then upon the ledge of the window. He buckled a broad leathern belt around her waist, and, gripping it firmly, intrusted himself and his precious burthen to the strength of the rope.

The darkness favoured them. They reached the ground in safety, and sped to the thicket, where Andrew waited with the horses. Lady Spens was mounted behind Gilbert, and the horses' heads were

turned toward Selkirk, at the same time that the door of the round chamber was burst open by Tushielaw, and the plight of his ambassador and the escape of his prize discovered.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## FLYING AND SEEKING.

“Lamentations heard i’ the air.”

*Macbeth.*

A DULL grey haze was rising from the ground and indicating the approach of daylight when the fugitives reached Merlin’s Cairn. They did not know whether or not they had been followed, but as they had made a detour in order to baffle their pursuers, the chase in the darkness must have been carried on at a disadvantage.

When she descried the house of the cairn the heart of Lady Spens bounded with unutterable joy. She would be restored to her child now; they would fly on to Edinburgh, and there she would

throw herself upon the protection of her former mistress, the Queen Dowager, and with her help be able to set Tushielaw and all his power at defiance. She did not doubt for an instant that her Majesty would refuse to believe her assertion of her own and her husband's innocence of all thought of treachery to the royal cause.

They could see no sign of a light burning within the house. Gilbert, however, knocked loudly upon the door, and they waited patiently for it to be opened.

But there came no answer, no sound to indicate that the house was inhabited. Gilbert knocked again, more loudly this time, and with a certain degree of puzzlement in his mind. There was still no answer, and at length they were forced to the conclusion that the house was untenanted.

Gilbert quieted the anxious fears of her ladyship.

“Do not fear, madam; the bairn is

safe," he said confidently; "safer than if we had found her here, for she is on the way to Edinburgh."

He pronounced his words confidently enough, but in his heart he feared that they might prove false. This was certainly the day on which he had charged the Chevalier Night, in the event of his failing to return, to convey the little Alice to the capital. But it was yet very early in the day, and so he dreaded that some new mischance had occurred. However, circumstances of which he was yet ignorant might have compelled the Chevalier to move northward sooner than was intended. With this hope he buoyed himself up, and was able to speak cheeringly to the anxious mother.

They hastened on to Selkirk. The royal burgh, with its straggling houses and irregular architecture, had usually a quaint homely air, suggestive of comfort and honest work. But when our three friends passed up the banks of the Ettrick and

entered the town on this December morning of 1513, the place had a dishevelled look like that of a woman who sits down with hair cast loose and dress disarranged, lamenting the loss of father, husband, or children.

This, in truth, was the position of Selkirk on that day ; for of the hundred sturdy burghers—made up of souters and weavers—who had followed the town-clerk, William Brydone, to the field of Flodden, only about twenty had yet returned to cast the town in mourning for its own and Scotland's heavy losses. Brydone, however, was amongst those who had returned, and with a noble, albeit sad heart, had set himself to work to give what consolation he might to the afflicted ones. In this he was not a little assisted by the merry-eyed weaver, who brought from the hard-fought field an English standard as a token of his own and his comrades' worth.

Everywhere there were indications of

disorder, and even the Souter's hostelry in the ancient market-place had a melancholy look.

But Gilbert delayed here no longer than was necessary to afford Lady Spens an hour's rest and to procure fresh horses. They were soon upon the road again; and having now a comparatively even way, they made good speed to Edinburgh, where they arrived towards afternoon, and took up temporary quarters near the foot of the Cowgate.

They desired as far as possible—or rather Lady Spens desired—to remain unrecognized until she had obtained audience of the Queen Regent. For this reason, instead of seeking out friends, they hired quiet lodgings, up three flights of stairs, of a little prim old lady, who was very particular to have a portion of the rent paid in advance.

Fatigued as she was by the journey and by troublous thought, Lady Spens would have hurried to the Palace at once had not

Gilbert persuaded her to delay till the morning. His persuasion was successful only when she remembered the words of Tushielaw—that her husband had been condemned by a secret commission, and that the lives of herself and her child were in peril.

“But you—you will prove his innocence; you will point out the guilty one, and redeem my husband’s honour from the stigma which now rests upon it,” she said softly; and laying her hand upon Gilbert’s arm, looked up confidently into his face.

“I have sworn to do it,” he said with quiet firmness.

Her fingers tightened gently upon his arm, and a faint sad smile illumed her face. That was his thanks, and he was satisfied.

He had set himself a difficult task—that of solving the mystery of her husband’s fate and of all the treachery that had surrounded the King at Flodden. He recognized the difficulty, but with the sanguineness of youth he never doubted that sooner or

later he would achieve his object. And then? He did not know what then; but he looked yearningly toward the lady for whom he had already risked so much and to whose service he had devoted his life.

To ascertain how far the name of Spens was compromised in the eyes of the citizens, and if possible to discover the chances of obtaining audience with the Queen, he at length sallied forth. Her ladyship had gone to rest, and the faithful old servitor Andrew remained to watch over her.

The snow, trodden hard by men and horses, rendered walking somewhat dangerous, and the faint light given by the feeble oil lamps scarcely served any purpose beyond that of showing the dense white fog which had gathered over the city on the hill. This was the night for careful burghers to coddle themselves up at their firesides and to keep safe within doors; for convivial burghers to share the jest and gossip of the tavern kitchen, and to become a prey to

lurking foodpads as they staggered homeward.

Gilbert turned up Blackfriars' Wynd, and he observed as he passed the Chancellor's house that there were busy doings within, judging by the illumination of the windows. And, in truth, there were busy doings, for Hamilton, Earl of Arran, had arrived that afternoon and taken up his quarters with Archbishop Beaton ; and as he was accompanied by his chief kinsmen and officers, with a fair number of rentallers and common followers, there was much bustle and feasting in the house.

Gilbert proceeded up the Wynd, and as he emerged into the High Street, a detachment of the City Guard passed without perceiving him. He turned towards the Cross, and presently entered the hostelry of St. Andrew's Rest.

The change from the darkness of the street to the bright light of the tavern was so sudden that for a minute he could discern nothing beyond a confusion of voices and a crowd of men.

He soon became accustomed to the change, however, and discovered that the company was composed of soldiers, drovers, and citizens, divided into groups, each gossiping of its own special topic of interest. An enormous fire burning on the hearth gave the chamber warmth and an air of comfort despite the wetness of the unflagged floor, upon which the snow from the guests' feet dissolved as it was shaken off, and slowly became absorbed in the earth, or formed into a tiny pool in some hollow place. Sundry flanks of bacon hanging from the roof intimated broadly that hungry men with a few groats in their pockets need not remain long unsatisfied.

The neat-handed, fat-faced hostess speedily served Gilbert with a flagon of mulled wine, and seating himself at the end of one of the tables he sipped and listened.

He did not wait long before the matter which interested him was touched.

A ferrety-eyed fussy little man in snuff-brown garments broke the ice by demanding

of one of the soldiers if he had been at Flodden.

There was a lull in the conversation of all those who heard the question, and although all fear of an English invasion was past, although the people had already begun in some degree to recover from the shock of the ill-fated battle, the mention of it was yet sufficient to call forth scowling and sorrowful wagging of heads.

“Ay, maister, I hae been there,” was the soldier’s response, “an’ I’m no proud to say that I hae come back again.”

“An’ were ye near the King?” with loyal eagerness queried a brawny northern drover.

“Sir,” said the fussy little man, looking at the northman with dignified reproof, “I’m Deacon Simpson, and I’m speaking tae this gentleman.”

“Atweel, man, I didna say that ye wasna speaking till him.”

“No, I was nae near him,” said the soldier; “but I’m tauld that some traitor’s

cantrips lost the day for us and made awa' wi' the King."

"And wha was the traitor?" demanded the drover.

"I canna tell ye that. Some say Lord Home, but I'll no believe that."

Deacon Simpson looked as if he could have enlightened them on the subject, but would not.

"Maybe ye ken, Maister Deacon," suggested the soldier.

"I'm no sure; but I could tell ye wha is tae suffer for't, whilk would no be a bad indication o' wha was the traitor."

"Wha is to suffer?" queried several.

"Is it Wat Spens?" queried others.

The deacon pursed his lips and looked mysterious.

"I'm very sorry, neebors, but I canna answer ye."

"Then I will," said a man at the farther end of the table in a loud voice.

All eyes were turned upon him, and, despite his disguise as a common drover,

Gilbert recognized Tushielaw, and at the same time became aware that the jovial-visaged man who sat beside the borderer was scanning his features narrowly. He raised his cup to his lips, thereby concealing his features to some extent.

The deacon methodically scratched his head and examined the borderer with the air of a sage puzzled.

“An’ wha may ye be, sir, that speak wi’ sae muckle authority?”

“Do you want to know the name of the villain who betrayed our King?” said Tushielaw fiercely, looking around and unheeding the representative of civic authority.

“Ay, tell us that if ye can,” cried the company.

“Then it was Wat Spens of Halstane.”

Gilbert sprang to his feet with the impulsive resolve to throw the lie back in the man’s teeth. But there was a murmur of rage and hate from all present which checked him. There was no surprise in the murmur, only bitter execration. The

name of Sir Walter Spens had already been publicly pronounced as that of the traitor upon whose shoulders was laid the burthen of all the misfortunes of the recent struggle.

Gilbert turned sadly away, paid his score to the hostess, and left the house. It would have been worse than useless to have attempted there to defend his friend.

As he passed from the hostelry, and whilst the gossips still groaned with rage at the tidings they had received, Tushielaw turned quickly to his companion, and in an undertone—

“Was that our man?”

The other nodded affirmatively.

“Fiends, and you have allowed him to go.”

“But not far—he is at the door still. I am ready.”

“He must not escape us, come what will.”

He of the jovial visage nodded again, and, drawing his heavy cloak tightly around his throat, he followed Tushielaw from the tavern after a hearty good night to the company.

Fury at the cruel and infamous charge made against an innocent man was not the only passion which disturbed Gilbert Elliot as he left the hostelry of St. Andrew's Rest.

He was sorely concerned for the safety of Lady Spens, whose presence in the city became doubly perilous now that Tushielaw had arrived, and having with him a companion who, Gilbert concluded rightly, was none other than the false friar he had handled so roughly in the round chamber of the tower.

He was not in any way concerned about his own safety; his whole mind was occupied in devising means to secure the safety of Lady Margaret, and of little Alice when she was found.

Busy with this riddle, he moved at a rapid pace toward the Netherbow Port. He scarcely knew the direction he had taken, and the dense fog concealed the landmarks which might have reminded him that he was moving away from the resting-place of her ladyship.

A dark figure passed under one of the feeble lamps, noiselessly and swiftly. When a few steps in advance of him the figure slackened its pace, and without looking round, spoke.

“Do not start or make any sign that I am speaking to you. I am a friend. You are followed by those who mean you harm. Can you risk yourself with me?”

“Who are you?”

“I have said a friend.”

“You have said so.”

“And you desire proof?”

“Surely.”

“And I have none to give you here, except my word, that I am your friend, Gilbert Elliot, and the friend of Walter Spens.”

“You know me?”

“Yes. Will you follow me?”

“Whither?”

“You shall see.”

“At what risk?”

“Not so much risk as you will have in turning back.”

“Go on—I take you.”

“Follow me close, and do not hesitate to pass wherever I lead.”

The figure was that of a man, and he quickened his pace again till he reached the Port. The sentinel challenged him, and the mysterious guide whispered some words in the man's ear.

A postern was hastily opened, and the stranger passed through, with Gilbert at his heels. The postern closed instantly. They were now in Canongate, which was at that time a burgh, independent of the city, under the charter of David I. The pious monarch, as the legend runs, was marvellously saved from the attack of a furious stag in Drumselch (to-day, Drum-sheuch) by the intervention of a mysterious cross, and in token of gratitude founded the Abbey of the Holy Rood, and, amongst numerous other privileges to its canons, the power of erecting a burgh between the Abbey and the Netherbow Port.

They had not gone many yards down

Canongate when they heard the sentinel of the Port give out his challenge again. They heard the postern open slowly, and their pace was quickened.

Suddenly Gilbert's singular guide gripped him by the arm and dragged him into a dark passage. Gilbert had scarcely time to lay his hand upon his sword, when a door was opened and he was dragged inside, just as he had been dragged into the passage.

The door closed, and hasty footsteps, as if in pursuit of some one, passed down the close or wynd.

Gilbert's arm was still in the grasp of his mysterious friend, but he could see nothing, as they were in darkness profound.

"You hear," said the mysterious one, as the footsteps passed, "they are seeking you."

"And I, coward-like, have been flying them. I will go at once."

He was interrupted by a firm but kindly voice.

“Nay, nay, Master Gilbert, there is better work for you to do. Step warily.”

They descended a steep narrow staircase, and then Gilbert followed his guide along a narrow passage, at the end of which a door opened and admitted them into a small square chamber, which was illumined by the subdued light of a closed lantern hanging from the roof.

Everything combined to add so much to the mystery which surrounded his strange friend, that Gilbert's bewilderment increased every instant. He now, however, availed himself of the light to examine his guide. He discovered little by his inspection, for the face was turned from him, and the figure was enveloped in a large mantle reaching to the heels.

Presently the hat and cloak were thrown aside, and Gilbert recognized the Chevalier Night, whose head was still covered by the skull-cap and his face by the black mask.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A SECRET MISSION.

“As the plain path to their design appears,  
Of whose wish’d sight they had been long debarr’d,  
By the dissolving of those threat’ning fears  
That many a purpose, many a plot, had marr’d;  
Their hope at full so heartily them cheers,  
And their protection by a stronger guard  
Lends them that leisure the events to cast  
Of things to come by those already past.”

DRAYTON.

“You are amazed,” said the Chevalier, in his low voice; “but you will understand all by-and-by; at present I can explain nothing.”

“I do not seek your confidence, sir; but I pray you acquaint me where is the child I trusted to your care?”

“Safe and well. I was compelled to leave the cairn sooner than I anticipated, and, dreading accident, brought the bairn with me. To-morrow I should have completed my promise to you by sending her to the Queen.”

“You have not done so yet—then she is here?”

“Not here.”

“Where, then?”

“I will take you to her.”

“Let it be at once, for without her the poor lady her mother is without hope.”

“Is Lady Spens in Edinburgh?”

The Chevalier's voice faltered a little here.

“Yes; we arrived this afternoon.”

“There is danger on every hand to her life and honour.”

“We know it; but she will obtain the Queen's protection.”

“I am not sure of that. Listen; the body of Walter Spens has not been found yet; it is suspected that he lives.”

“Impossible. He would have made himself known to me or to his wife.”

The Chevalier shook his head sadly. “He is condemned to torture and to death; but more, all those who give him shelter, or even know that he lives without delivering him up, are condemned to a like punishment. He might conceal himself from you, and even from his wife, lest any accident should betray your knowledge, and bring upon you the fate undeserved by you and by him. Lady Spens is suspected, is sought for, and every hour she remains in Scotland adds to her peril.”

“She will not leave Scotland till her husband’s honour is redeemed.”

The Chevalier seemed to reflect. Presently—

“Her only hope of safety, then, rests in the Queen’s protection, and I fear that may be difficult to obtain now.”

“And wherefore?”

“Because the Queen herself is under the influence of Douglas, Earl of Angus, and

through him Scott of Tushielaw has obtained the lands of Spens."

"The lands of Spens gifted to Tushielaw?"

"Even so."

"This is monstrous."

"But the Lords in Council have decreed it, and we must bow to the law till we can show its injustice, or become strong enough to overthrow it. You see, I have thought much of these matters, and I think you may credit me as a friend of the house of Spens."

"I do, without a doubt."

"You would risk something to retrieve the honour of Sir Walter?"

"I count risk as nothing. To prove his truth I would give my life."

"And you would do something to punish the treachery which destroyed our good King at Flodden?"

"To help that object there is nothing I would not do."

"Your hand upon it."

Their hands were joined for an instant, and a bond of friendship was silently sealed between them. Then, the Chevalier—

“You shall begin the work at once. Here is a secret—Douglas aspires to the hand of the Queen.”

“What, before the people are satisfied that the King is dead?”

“The Earl of Angus cares little what the people think.”

“Well, and does this affect our cause?”

“Much, as you shall learn. Hamilton of Arran, who opposes Douglas in the grand struggle for supremacy in the guidance of our unhappy country, was the friend of Spens. Tushielaw has more than once served Douglas, who therefore favours him. Should Douglas become husband to the Queen, there is little hope that we shall ever be able to revoke the judgment pronounced upon our friend.”

“We cannot stay the union, indiscreet as it may be.”

“But we can serve others who may have the power to prevent it. Take this packet. I will guide you to the King’s Park. After leaving me, you will find a man waiting at the north gate. You will say to him, ‘England wakes.’ Why do you start?”

“I will not serve England.”

“No, but you will serve Scotland and Sir Walter Spens.”

“I doubt if this will serve either.”

“It is our only chance of serving both.”

“Explain, then.”

“Not now. I cannot.”

“Then take back the packet.”

“Foolish youth, are you afraid?”

“Yes, of being false to myself and to my country.”

“You shall be false to neither, I pledge myself.”

“That is not enough,” persisted Gilbert, dourly.

The Chevalier raised his hand to his mask as if to tear it from his face. He checked himself, and said, sadly—

“As you will; I do not mean to force your humour; but I thought that you had learned to trust me.”

Something in the man's voice and manner inspired confidence.

“Give me the packet; I will go.”

“That is well for all of us. You remember the signal?”

“‘England wakes.’”

“The man will answer, if he be the one you seek, ‘Scotland wakes.’ Follow him. He will conduct you to a lady, who will ask how England fares. For answer you will give her this missive.”

“May there be need for a sword?”

“Perhaps not; but keep guard. Above all, be silent as to whence you come, and let no word escape you to show that you have divined anything of the contents of the packet. Come.”

They passed out by the same mysterious route as they had entered the place. Then, down Canongate to the Park. Gilbert proceeded alone towards the Palace. Near

one of the private doors in the park wall he found a stripling pacing up and down, as if to keep his blood in circulation whilst he waited for some one.

“England wakes.”

The youth halted, and, peering through the mist, made answer—

“Scotland wakes.”

The page—such Gilbert concluded to be the youth’s degree—opened the wall door and locked it again as soon as they had got into the Park. He then led the way toward the chapel at a quick pace. The path chosen by the guide was screened from the east wind by a thick hedgerow.

Gilbert kept close to his guide, remembering always the warning of the Chevalier to be on his guard. The warning served, as it seemed, for suddenly he heard a sound as of the advancing footsteps of a man. The page gave a sharp whistle, and darted forward, as if with the intention of leaving Gilbert behind. The latter, however, laid hold of his cloak and held him still, whilst

he touched him on the brow with the flat of his poignard.

“ Make another sound, attempt to slip from my grasp, and you shall not live to betray another.”

“ Don’t—don’t kill me ; they didn’t mean to kill you.”

“ What, then ? ”

“ They only wanted to know the message you carry.”

“ And who are they ? ”

“ I dare not tell you—I dare not.”

“ You must speak—who ? ”

“ Angus. Don’t press my throat so hard. I’ll take you safely.”

“ Don’t speak so loud. I cannot trust you ; but, understand me, the least sign of treachery you make will be the signal for me to strike you down.”

They had been hurrying forward during this hasty whispered conversation, and they soon reached the Abbey Chapel. A side door of the Chapter House opened to the summons of the page. Gilbert found him-

self in the presence of a lady, who started slightly at the sight of him. She was closely veiled, so that he could see nothing of her features, and so her surprise was to him most inexplicable.

She recovered herself immediately, and quietly motioned him to follow her. He obeyed, keeping a firm hold of the page all the time.

The place was dimly lighted by a couple of wax candles at the farther end, towards which the party moved.

Beneath the lights Gilbert saw a second lady, taller and more matronly in figure than the first. She was also closely veiled, but the richness of her somewhat sombre attire indicated that she was of considerable rank. To her the first lady, who appeared to be of a quick lively nature, whispered something and then drew back a pace.

The page was ordered to withdraw.

“I cannot, my lady; this gentleman holds me so tightly.”

“You have heard my direction, sir?”  
this imperiously to Gilbert.

“Yes, madam, but pardon me. I have already had reason to doubt the honesty of this youth, and——”

“How? Do you refuse to release him?”

“No, my lady, I do not refuse, but I would rather keep him here?”

“Who are you?”

“A soldier, madam, and Gilbert Elliot by name.”

“Your rank?”

“Only what my sword may win me.”

The lady's head moved haughtily, even contemptuously, and the blood crimsoned Gilbert's face.

“The rank will not be high since you fear a couple of women.”

“You mistake, lady; I fear nothing for myself from you or from those you may have within call. But there are those for whose sake my life is valuable.”

“Obey, sirrah, and be silent.”

“I may obey when I know you; meanwhile you must pardon me.”

The lady's foot patted the ground impatiently, and Gilbert coolly retained his grasp of the frightened page. The lady spoke again.

"I wish you would let the boy go, sir soldier; it is necessary that he should be beyond hearing."

Gilbert instantly released the page.

"What you demanded, lady, I was able to refuse. When you ask I must obey," and he bowed his head with a courtesy that would have done credit to the most experienced gallant.

"My faith," said the lady in French to her companion, and laughing, "here is a cavalier worth having near us." Gilbert looked somewhat awkward.

"You understand me," said the lady, turning to him quickly. "No matter, I think I spoke truly."

"I hope so, madam."

The page had retired to the door.

"I am satisfied," she went on. "Now, how fares England?"

Gilbert presented the packet.

She broke it open, and perused the contents with evident signs of impatience and anger. When she had finished reading she crumpled the paper in her hand.

“This must have an answer such as it merits. Where may you be found, sir?”

“At Mrs. Nicol’s, Cowgate.”

“You shall hear from me. Adieu.”

Gilbert bowed respectfully, and was conducted back to the door by the lady who had admitted him. As she opened the door she whispered hastily—

“Fortune is near you.”

The voice did not sound strange in his ear; but before he could identify the speaker or express thanks the door closed between them, and the page stood sulkily waiting to conduct him through the Park.

## CHAPTER X.

### SOMETHING MYSTERIOUS.

“Whoever is the mother of one chylde,  
Which, having thought long dead, she fyndes alive,  
Let her by prooffe of that which she hath fylde  
In her own breast, this mother’s joy describe ;  
For other none such passion can contrive  
In perfect forme as this good ladye felt  
When she so fair a daughter saw survive.”

*The Faery Queen.*

GILBERT was conducted safely through the Park to the place where he had found the page waiting an hour before. His guide having bade him a sulky adieu, our adventurer proceeded with quick strides to the spot where the Chevalier had arranged to await his return.

He found him, and briefly related all that

had passed, not omitting the singular communication made to him by the lady who had accompanied him to the door. The Chevalier pressed his arm as if in congratulation.

“I trust the lady prophesied truly ; and mayhap her random words were nearer truth than she or you imagined.”

“It may be so, for folk say that fortune favours all who have hearts stubborn enough to besiege the jade till she yields.”

“And when she yields, do you ever dream of the form you would have her favours take ?”

“The vision is very faint. When my poor mother lived she would at whiles when she was saddest take me down from Halstane to Binram’s Cross, and there, whilst we heard the Yarrow moaning by us, she would tell me strange tales of the brave knights of Binram. Sometimes I dream that I should like to be one of them, for my mother loved them, although her family had been at feud with the lords of Binram for long years.”

“Your mother was one of the Elliots of Minto?”

“Yes, but she lived apart from her family on account of some quarrel, the nature of which I have failed to learn hitherto. She lived at Halstane with her kinsman Walter Spens, in whose arms she died.”

“And where was your father?”

They walked on a little way in silence. Then Gilbert, huskily—

“Dead, I believe.”

“Have you never attempted to make yourself known to his family—or to adopt his name?”

“You press me sorely, comrade, but since we have touched upon this matter we will finish it now. By snatches I have learned something of a cruel story from my mother and from Spens. When she was in direst distress my father’s friends turned coldly from her. My father himself was many years away occupied in the wars of France and the Low Country. Either his messages were never delivered or he had learned to forget his wife.”

“ You speak harshly.”

“ And if I do it is because my mother’s memory is so dear to me, and because she suffered cruelly. From the time that I began to grasp the meaning of these things I said in the bitterness of my heart that I would never seek my father or his name ; that with what strength Heaven would be pleased to give me I should make a name for myself that would rank without a blush beside that of my father, even had it been one of the noblest in the land. So let our gossip end.”

To this the Chevalier made no response, but the sad story of a neglected wife which was thus briefly indicated by Gilbert was not to end so abruptly as he appeared to desire. Far removed, as it seemed, from his present life, it was one of the currents which was to swell the tide of his affairs much more than he anticipated.

They were now on the south side of Canongate, and not far from the Netherbow Port. They stopped at the foot of one of

those narrow outside staircases peculiar to the construction of the houses of that period.

“We have something to learn here, perhaps,” whispered the Chevalier; “something that may concern our cause nearly. Step softly.”

They ascended the staircase, and the Chevalier, after passing his hand carefully over the door, pressed one of the nails with his finger. No sound was heard, but presently the door was cautiously opened and the two men entered. The door closed in the same cautious manner as it had opened.

Then a light, which appeared to be placed on the top of a child’s head, moved along the passage before them, up two steps at the back part of the house, and into a small three-cornered chamber which had apparently been designed originally for a pantry.

The light was lowered to the ground, and Gilbert recognized in its bearer Hornie, the dwarf.

A look of intelligence passed between them.

“You have met before?” said the Chevalier.

“Yes,” responded Gilbert quickly; “with his aid I gained entrance to Tushielaw’s Tower, and——”

“Whisht—haud your whisht,” interrupted the dwarf, with a comical expression of alarm on his big disproportioned face; “fy on’t, would ye put red-hot cinders amang dry haystacks?”

And he motioned with his finger toward the wall as if indicating the danger of being overheard. The next minute he extinguished the light.

The sound of voices from another apartment reached Gilbert’s ears, and the pronunciation of his own name and that of Lady Spens quickened his curiosity.

The Chevalier drew him to the wall; a portion of the panelling was removed, and a diamond-shaped eye-hole admitted the light from the next chamber. Gilbert

looked through the hole and perceived those arch conspirators, Adam Scott of Tushielaw and the sham friar Simon.

There was a third, to whom both seemed to pay singular deference, and upon whom both seemed to be earnestly urging something. This third person owned a gainly figure, tall, muscular, and youthful, with keen dark eyes and a bearing haughty as that of the proudest monarch.

He spoke with a decisive tone of authority.

“Now, mark me, with the persons you name I have nothing to do. To-night you have blundered as the stupidest gilly to be found on Angus would not have blundered——”

“We did not get the full signal,” growled Tushielaw.

Haughtily the stranger continued, without the slightest heed to the explanation vouchsafed—

“The knowledge of the contents of the missive that fellow succeeded in carrying safely to its destination was of the highest

import to me. You have failed to procure that for me, and yet you"—to Tushielaw—"ask me to close the palace doors in the face of an unfortunate lady; and you"—to the friar—"ask me to secure for you the lordship of Binram."

"It is my right," said Mess Simon, frowning; "the late lord was my father's brother, and, dying without issue, I am his heir through my father."

"That is, you would have been the heir direct had your mother been your father's wife."

This was pronounced with a cool contempt, under which the subject writhed.

"All the priests in Christendom could not have made me more the son of Heron Barras, whose name I bear."

"Or less worthy of the honours you seek."

"These are hard words, my lord, and unwise, since it is in my power to retaliate."

"Soh! you threaten."

"No, I only warn."

His lordship's lips moved scornfully.

“And think you, sir, that I will heed your warning or your threats?”

“It may be well to do so,” said Simon, significantly.

“Bah! Why, man, do you know what it is you want me to do—to raise you to the peerage?”

“And you, my lord, do you know what it is you want us to do—to raise you to a throne?”

The retort struck home, and his lordship started fiercely.

“You lie, churl——” Then, checking himself, he said with suppressed rage, “You mistake my motives. In all that I do my first thought is for my country.”

“And the second for Douglas,” interrupted Simon, with a sneer.

“I have no mind to discuss my actions with you,” said his lordship, coldly; “enough that for what service you may do me you shall be requited.”

“Then I am satisfied,” rejoined Simon, or Heron Barras, as we had better call him, since we know that to be his real name.

During this discussion Tushielaw had been standing with arms folded, moodily watching the disputants.

“I, too, am satisfied,” he said now; “but your lordship will understand that in what has been done and in what may be to do I do not question your reasons. I am content to know that in serving you I serve myself.”

“Wherein lies the ground of my confidence in you,” said his lordship, rising and drawing his cloak about him. “I have told you what I desire, and if the result be as I wish I shall not fail to help you in your claims.”

Barras bowed his head submissively, for to him the latter words were addressed.

Gilbert found himself drawn away from his point of observance at this stage of the proceedings.

“We must go,” said the Chevalier in his ear.

They were conducted stealthily to the door, and before they had reached the

middle of the street they heard the tread of three men descending the outside staircase.

“Did you recognize them?” questioned the Chevalier.

“Yes. Tushielaw, the half-brother of Lady Spens, and Douglas. My poor lady needs help indeed, since so much power opposes her.”

“And she shall have help, fear not. Now for the bairn.”

As he spoke the Chevalier opened the door of a house nearly opposite the one they had just quitted. They passed into a dark room, where by the aid of a flint a light was procured. Gilbert surmised correctly that this was the same house into which he had been taken some hours previously to elude the pursuit of Tushielaw and Barras.

Here he was left alone for a few minutes, and when the Chevalier returned he carried wee Alice in his arms. He held her to his breast with a singular tenderness, and he passed her to Gilbert hesitatingly, as if reluctant to part with her. He suddenly

drew her back to him, and said, with an inexplicable emotion in his tone—

“Stay, I will carry her to the lodgings of her mother. That will avoid any difficulty in passing the Port.”

Gilbert was struck by the manner and the voice, and silently followed the man, who seemed to have become strangely interested in his affairs and those of Lady Spens.

When they returned to the street the fog was slowly rising from the city, and the chill air of morning swept coldly up the hill. The Chevalier with the solicitude almost of a woman folded his cloak around the child, and at a quick pace they proceeded toward the Cowgate.

Arrived at Mrs. Nicol's door, Andrew, looking fatigued and anxious, made his appearance.

“Saints save us, Maister Gilbert,” he said, holding up the light. “Whar hae ye been roving till a' nicht?”

“Never mind that, Andrew. What I

have brought here is worth roving twenty nights for. Here is Alice."

"Hooly," cried the veteran, with a jump of joy, "but that's guid news for my lady. She has been up this three hours walking about, no able to sleep, and asking every five minutes if ye had come back. Hooly, hooly, but this is braw news."

The old man's exclamations of joy brought Lady Spens to the door.

"The bairn, Gilbert," she cried, grasping him by the arm; "you have found her, you have found her."

"She is here," said Gilbert, stepping aside, and revealing the Chevalier, who still held the child.

With a cry of delight, the lady sprang forward and snatched the precious one from the man's arm. Whilst she covered the child with passionate kisses she did not see that the man's eyes were fixed upon her with a strange yearning, and that he trembled.

There was an interruption here by the

appearance of Mrs. Nicol in an enormous night-cap, with any amount of frill, a night-gown, and a flannel petticoat thrown hastily over her, and her feet thrust into a pair of shoes which were much too big for her, and which, consequently, made considerable noise as she shuffled along the passage. There was a look of alarm upon her aged face, and the light she carried shook nervously in her hand.

“Gude preserve us all! what gate are ye ganging in my house at this hour?”

“Whisht ye, auld woman, whisht ye,” said Andrew, persuasively. “I’ll tell ye a’ aboot it enoo.”

“I’ll no whisht me,” cried the ancient lady, irately; “and I’ll no be ca’d auld woman in my ain house.”

“Weel, weel, young woman, then,” said Andrew, attempting to remedy his error.

“And I’ll no be ca’d young woman either,” interrupted Mrs. Nicol, placing her disengaged hand to her side with an air of resolution.

“Then what the devil will ye be ca’d?” cried Andrew, in bewilderment.

Gilbert interfered, and speedily succeeded in changing the old lady’s wrath into good humour by acquainting her that he had just succeeded in restoring her lodger’s lost child, whom they had come to Edinburgh to seek.

Whilst Mrs. Nicol was conducting Lady Spens to her chamber, and expressing her wonder and pleasure on the way, Gilbert turned to speak to the Chevalier, but he had disappeared.

The recovery of her child was to the unfortunate Lady Spens as a reprieve to the condemned at the foot of the scaffold. At first her heart was filled with too much joy to permit her to think of the innumerable dangers which surrounded her—dangers which required her concealment, and which were not, therefore, in any way relieved by the presence of Alice, but rather increased. When she did become calm enough to think of these matters, the supreme speculation

which presented itself was as to the means of obtaining audience with the Queen.

Upon this speculation came trooping all the black horrors of her position. She, the wife of a condemned traitor, dared not present herself at the palace gates, make known her name, and request admission. If she were to do this, would she not be turned away with scorn—perhaps seized and cast into a loathsome prison? Who would then listen to her protestations of innocence? Clearly, as she could only hope for clemency from her Majesty, she must be in her presence before she declared her name or purpose.

But there was the difficulty, and she could find no means of overcoming it.

Then she hugged her child to her breast, sobbing bitterly, and little Alice looked up into her face, marvelling at her sorrow.

“Mamma,” said the little one, folding her tiny arms round the mother’s neck, and looking wistfully into the tearful eyes, “why do you greet so?”

“I am troubled, Aly, that is why.”

“Then let us go to papa.”

“Ah, my darling, if that were possible!”  
And she hid her face upon the child’s shoulder.

“I saw him,” said Aly, nodding her little head with an air of profound wisdom.

“You saw him?” said Lady Margaret, starting, and for an instant forgetting the improbability of what her child stated.

“Yes, I saw him,” continued Aly, “last night and the night before that.”

“Where, Aly, where?”

“When the man with the black thing on his face took me away, there was an old woman washed me and dressed me, and gave me everything that I could eat. Then she put me to bed, and when I wakened through the night, wondering where you were, mamma, there was somebody bending over me, and I was frightened. ‘Don’t be frightened, Aly,’ he said; and I looked up, and saw it was papa.”

“Did you hold out your hands—did you catch him in your arms?”

Aly shook her head.

“No, I was going to do that, mamma, but I was frightened again when I saw his face; it was so white and strange. While I was looking at him he stooped down and kissed me; and oh, he was so very cold, mamma.”

The child's eyes filled with tears, and she shivered as if she felt the ice-like kiss upon her lips again.

“Well, Aly, well, what happened after that?” queried the lady eagerly.

“Then, after that, he seemed to go away, and I couldn't see where he went to; but he didn't go out by the door.”

The wife, trembling between hope and doubt, passed her hand across her eyes as if to clear her vision.

“But you saw him again, Aly; what did he say the next time?”

“The second night I wakened, and there was somebody sobbing beside me, just as you were, mamma; and when I turned my head, I saw a man sitting on the chair with

his head bowed upon his hands. He heard me stirring, and I looked up and I saw it was papa ; and, although his face was white, white and cold, I held out my hands to him, and he took me in his bosom and kept me there till I fell asleep. When I wakened in the morning he was away, and the old woman Kirsty would not tell me anything about him ; and when I asked the man with the black thing on his face he only shook his head this way, and said nothing."

Whilst Aly shook her head in imitation of the man in the mask, Lady Spens covered her face with her hands.

"It was a foolish thought," she moaned, "that he could live and fail to seek me. My bonny bairn, papa will never come to us any more except in dreams, as you have seen him."

"Oh, but I was not dreaming. I am quite, quite sure I saw him."

"You have not spoken of this to any one else, Aly ?" said the mother, as she thought

of the new danger these visions of the child might bring upon them.

“No, mamma.”

“Then you will not speak of it to any one except to me—not even to Andrew.”

Aly promised obedience, and at that instant there was an authoritative knock upon the outer door, which caused the lady to start and listen in dread lest her retreat had been discovered.

In another chamber Gilbert had just risen from the couch on which he had been resting for a few hours, and had, with the aid of a bucket of water procured by Andrew from the water-cart which had just passed, washed himself, when he too was startled by the loud knocking on the outer door.

Andrew entered the room hurriedly.

“Something awsome is the matter noo,” he said; “here is an officer of the Queen’s Guard wants to see ye.”

“Admit him—stop, give me my belt first.”

Andrew handed him the belt, which he

had been cleaning, and just as Gilbert completed his attire by buckling on his sword Andrew ushered in the officer.

A tall gentleman, with an abrupt unpleasant manner, which contrasted oddly with a kindly face—

“Master Gilbert Elliot?”

“The same, at your service,” returned Gilbert, bowing.

“Captain Lindsay desired me to deliver this, and to inquire when he might expect you to report yourself?”

Gilbert was somewhat puzzled to know what Captain Lindsay wanted him to report himself for. He, however, took the despatch which his visitor presented to him, and upon opening it read his appointment as a gentleman of the Queen’s Guard. With the first flush of surprise and pleasure this unexpected piece of good fortune inspired, was mingled the consciousness of the additional power this appointment would give him to support the cause of Lady Spens.

“I thank you, sir, for the good tidings you bring me here, and, as your comrade in arms, salute you.”

“Your answer to Captain Lindsay?”

“I will report myself within the hour.”

“Good; I salute you, comrade.”

The officer extended his hand, which Gilbert shook heartily.

“Do I join you at the Castle or the Palace?”

“At the Palace.”

The officer inclined his head stiffly, wheeled about, and departed.

As soon as Gilbert had reported to Lady Margaret the good fortune that had befallen him he proceeded to the Palace, and, upon inquiring for Captain Lindsay, he was taken by a soldier to the guard-room. There he found the gentleman who had brought him the commission in conversation with several others.

The officer in his abrupt way introduced Master Elliot as one of them; and then led him into another apartment where they were alone together.

"I desired to see Captain Lindsay," said Gilbert, looking around.

"I am he."

"You—I was not aware——"

"No matter. I desired to be the first to see you, and therefore delivered your commission myself."

"I am honoured."

"No. I desired to judge for myself whether or not you were worthy of the place you have obtained. I am satisfied."

"Thank you," and Gilbert bowed somewhat haughtily.

The captain proceeded without noticing the interruption.

"To-day your uniform will be prepared; to-morrow at eight o'clock you will take your place among us. At eleven we attend the King and his royal mother through the Park."

"I shall be ready."

Thus the interview closed, and Gilbert departed with a smile, for it appeared to him that much of the captain's harshness

was assumed in order to conceal a kindly nature.

As he was passing through one of the courts a page touched his sleeve.

“ Master Gilbert Elliot ? ”

“ I’ faith,” said that gentleman, laughing, as he turned to the page, “ Master Gilbert Elliot appears to be in request in these quarters. That is my name, my man.”

“ This way, then.”

“ At your service.”

Gilbert followed the page to the other side of the court, then along a number of corridors, wondering all the while what was about to betide him now, till he became aware that he was in the royal residence.

The page opened a private door and closed it after them. They passed up a winding staircase and into a narrow corridor. Here the page requested him to wait for a few minutes and disappeared. Presently he returned and conducted Gilbert into a richly furnished chamber, where he left him without a word.

## CHAPTER XI.

### IN FORTUNE'S WAY.

“ But lively was the mingled thrill  
That chased that momentary chill,  
For love's keen wish was there ;  
And eager Hope and Valour high,  
And the proud glow of Chivalry,  
That burned to do and dare.”

*The Bridal of Triermain.*

“ WELL,” said Gilbert, clasping his hands behind him, after having gazed for several minutes in dumb puzzlement at the door of the chamber where the page had left him, “ one would enjoy this position considerably more if one could only make out its meaning. Marry, here is a boudoir for a Queen ; and surely some lady inhabits it, if one may judge by this harp, these

music scrolls, and this tambour frame. Then why am I brought here?"

That was precisely the question for which he could not devise any answer. So, like a wise man, he began to pace the chamber and to try to fix his thoughts upon some other subject than the meaning of his presence there. He soon, however, found that tiresome work, and advanced into the deep recess of the window to seek some amusement.

He looked out upon the private gardens of the Palace and discovered a group which interested him. The group was composed of a number of ladies and gentlemen, amongst whom three figures attracted his special attention.

The first was that of a child scarcely two years old, a bright-eyed, happy-faced, fair-headed little fellow, who was apparently in high delight with the jewelled hilt of the sword of the gentleman who carried him. This gentleman was the second attraction to the observer. He was tall, of well-knit

figure, with keen bright eyes, and all the bearing of noble blood and high rank.

Beside these two walked a lady, whose height was a little above the average, whose form was graceful, whose step was firm, and whose handsome head, with rather masculine features, was carried haughtily.

In her Gilbert fancied he recognized the lady to whom he had delivered the secret missive in the chapel on the previous night. In the three figures he recognized the child King James V., Douglas of Angus, and the Queen.

He was so much occupied in watching the group in the garden that he did not observe the door open or know that a lady had entered.

Bright large dark eyes, with a twinkle of humour in them that might have changed to a glow of hate; small clearly defined and regular features: a profusion of glossy black hair; a figure below the average in height, slim but light and graceful as that of a fairy, robed in a dress of dark silk.

This was the lady who stood watching Gilbert with a merry glimmer in her bright eyes.

“Master Elliot,” she repeated for the third time softly.

Gilbert started, wheeled round, and with an exclamation of surprise doffed his hat and bowed low.

“Have you forgotten me?” she said, extending a little white hand.

“It is impossible to forget Lady Mary Douglas,” he said, taking the hand respectfully.

A slight flush coloured her somewhat pale cheeks, but it passed away instantly.

“Yet you did not recognize me through my veil last night,” she returned, laughing a subdued silvery peal.

“Pardon me; I was confused, I think, by the business in which I was engaged,” he said, with a degree of awkwardness.

“Important business, I am aware; but fie, a gallant and courtier would never have

forgotten even the voice of a lady for whom he had once risked his life."

"Possibly a gallant and courtier would never have been in a position to forget such an event."

"Ah, I am hit. I see you parry words with as much adroitness as you parry sword-thrusts. We shall talk as friends, and so I will cheat you of a victory."

"I suspect the gain will be on my side."

"I shall not be sorry either way. You received your commission to the Queen's Guard this morning?"

"I did, and now I understand to what good spirit I am indebted for the favour."

"It is to the Queen, not to me, you are indebted," interrupted Lady Mary, hastily. "She was amused and struck by your firmness last night, and has taken the first opportunity to show her goodwill."

"It was the Queen, then, to whom I delivered the despatch?"

"Yes. Did you not divine?"

"Not till a few minutes since; you will

forgive me if I continue to think that I had an intercessor with her Majesty."

Lady Mary laughed gaily.

"Be seated, then, and I will tell you."

Gilbert placed a chair—by accident beside the harp—for the lively little lady, and, obeying a dainty motion of her hand, seated himself near her.

Then she rested one hand upon the harp, and as she spoke her fingers mechanically passed over the strings. She gossiped easily, merrily, but there was an undercurrent in her mirth, an undercurrent of passion—perhaps of love.

"Well, when you left us in the chapel, her Majesty, who was in a pretty rage, I promise you, with the missive you brought from her brother——"

"From her brother?"

"Yes, Henry of England—did you not know whose despatch you carried?"

"I knew nothing."

"That is strange; but it matters nothing to us, and so we will let it pass. As I was

saying, she was in a pretty rage till she remembered your resolute countenance and the timid face of the page; then she laughed and asked me if I had ever seen such a terribly fierce gentleman. I answered that I never had seen one so fierce or—— ”

She stopped, flushed faintly, and the fairy fingers flew over the harp-strings nervously, producing a discordant sound which attracted her own attention.

“What am I doing?” she cried, laughing; “you see, Master Elliot, how forgetful Court life and a sojourn in France makes one. I was telling you about the Queen, was I not?”

“I think so.”

“Think?—are you not sure?”

It was Gilbert's turn to laugh now.

“There are other causes of forgetfulness besides Court life and a sojourn in France, my lady.”

She held up her hand coquettishly.

“Flatterer—but I see you were born to

be a courtier, although you have hitherto preferred the wild life of the borders. I was telling you about the Queen, and I was saying that I had informed her of my former acquaintance with you. Upon this she would not be satisfied till I had told her all I knew of you. Then I related to her how about two years ago there was a lady in a barque beset by a storm off the coast of Dunbar, how there was only one man who would risk his life to save the lady's, how bravely he did risk it and saved her, and how that man was Gilbert Elliot and that lady her devoted attendant, Mary Douglas, and that ever since she has felt herself under a debt of gratitude—stay, where have we arrived at now?"

Gilbert was blushing like a girl at the reference to his own noble action, and the lady's pale face was suffused with crimson, her eyes' brightness intensified with the excitement of the memory, when a second time she checked herself.

"I see you do not like the story," she

resumed brusquely, "so we will hurry forward. When I had told her this she said that she had need of such men as you—need of one upon whose truth she could depend in good or ill, in life or death, and I answered that such truth was yours. Did I do wrong?"

There was more earnestness in the question than Gilbert perceived or understood. He was confused and silent.

"You do not answer," she said quickly; "have I done wrong? You are pained—forgive me."

It was impossible to hear these warm impulsive words, impossible to look upon the proud beautiful face, and not be inspired with a yearning to be worthy of the heart to which it was so fair an index. Something of this Gilbert felt; but nothing clearly.

"Forgive you?" he said earnestly; "it is I, my lady, who must seek forgiveness. I who have been so churlish as to leave you to think for an instant that anything you

could do or say would give me offence. I wish from my heart the service I have rendered you had been more worthy of your remembrance."

"Now, my faith, I am pleased that you are not displeased, as I began to fear. For the service, you could scarcely do anything more worthy of remembrance than you have done. Ah, be sure, Master Elliot, my debt is not paid yet."

"You must not think so."

"How, sirrah," stamping her dainty little foot upon the floor, and gaily mimicking the imperative manner of the Queen on the previous evening; "do you dictate?"

He caught her humour, and enjoyed the jest.

"Then, lady, since you insist that you are my debtor," he said, dropping upon one knee with all the air of a courtier presenting a petition to his sovereign, "I charge you now redeem the debt, and add to it a little credit, so that our positions may change, and I become debtor to you for life."

There was a vein of sincerity in his tone which combined with his position to startle pretty Mistress Douglas a little.

"Can that be done?" she queried, with the faintest degree of hesitation.

"It can—it can."

He was thoroughly in earnest now, and in his excitement seized her hand.

She rose to her feet quietly.

"Show me how," she returned, playfully attempting to wrest her hand away.

"Procure a private audience of the Queen for a very dear friend of mine."

"Who is the friend?"

"An unfortunate lady."

"A lady?"—the hand was snatched away from him now, and the face was turned a little to one side. "Go on—who is the lady?"

"Margaret Spens."

The face was turned to him briskly.

"The daughter of Barras—the wife of Walter Spens?"

"The same—the same."

She shook her head repressively.

“It is impossible ; the name of Spens of Halstane is forbidden in the Palace ; he is condemned to ignominy for ever ; the life of the poor lady herself, I fear, is not safe.”

“But Walter Spens was innocent—he has been condemned unjustly—I tell you he was innocent, and I’ll stake my life upon it. There was not one drop of blood in his whole body that was not warm with loyalty ; there was no thought in his good heart that was not for his King. And this is the man who is condemned to ignominy as a traitor !”

“It is the heart of Gilbert Elliot that speaks, and I would not wish it to speak otherwise.”

“Then believe that it speaks truly. You turn away your face—you doubt. Ah, lady, if you had known him as I have known him—he was my guardian, my second father ; he was a brother to my poor mother in her hour of sorest need ; he made me what I am—what courage, what skill, what truth

I own, I owe it all to him. He was no traitor, lady, but a loyal gentleman upon whom villany has fixed its foulest stain."

"You loved him, then?"

"Next to my mother best of all the world."

Mistress Douglas knit her smooth white brow and closed her lips reflectively. Then—

"Lady Spens, that was Margaret Barras, was some time one of her Majesty's ladies?"

"Yes, and a favourite with her. Upon that she rests the hope of her plea."

"What is her plea?"

"To obtain protection for herself and her child till she can show proof of her husband's honesty."

A little further reflection, and with a bright smile—

"There is my hand, Master Elliot; I will try to help you—but do not let the lady hope much, for I have heard the Queen speak very bitterly of Spens."

He pressed her hand to his lips respectfully.

“I cannot speak my thanks, but should the day come when you need help—my life is yours.”

“To-morrow I will acquaint you with the course to take.”

She touched a silver bell; the page who had brought Gilbert to the chamber appeared, and conducted him back to the outer court.

Then Gilbert bent his way towards the Cowgate with long swinging strides, and a lighter, happier heart than he had known since Flodden fight.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE QUEEN'S RIDE.

“ *Cade*. Was ever feather so lightly blown to and fro as this multitude ? ”—*Henry VI., Part II.*

On the succeeding morning drums and fifes and trumpets were playing loudly if not harmoniously. The King and his Royal mother, the Queen Regent, were to ride in the Park, and consequently there was much bustle everywhere in the Palace. When at length the Royal cortége started, their Majesties were attended by the ladies and gentlemen of the household, some half-dozen noblemen, and the gentlemen of the Queen's Guard.

Amongst the chief nobles were Angus, and his rival for supremacy in the Councils

of the State, Arran. Open rupture had not yet taken place between these two, but each eyed the other with the consciousness that he was looking upon his deadly enemy. Each watched the other as closely as if he had been a thief who had obtained entrance to a jewel cabinet ; each dreading lest any chance or mistake on his part might give the other opportunity to steal the precious jewel for the possession of which both were striving. In the presence of Royalty, however, they as yet comported themselves toward each other with quiet circumspection, if not with respect.

A crowd of citizens and sundry corporations had been admitted to the Park, and formed a living avenue through which the Royal party passed, saluted on all sides by loyal acclamations.

Not so many months afterwards the same crowd saw her pass through its midst, and what salutations she received were very faint and hollow.

However, the salutations at present were

honest enough, and her Majesty's humour was gratified. She was in the mood now to be merciful and bounteous if occasion required; and this happy humour had rather increased than diminished when, after having ridden at a slow pace some distance beyond Salisbury Crags, she gave the order for return to the Palace.

The loyal people were waiting to catch another glimpse of their King and his guardian, and their shouts were more enthusiastic than before, if that could have been.

There was of a sudden perceptible a certain motion in the crowd, as if some other object than the Royal party had attracted its attention. Somebody broke through the barriers; there was a shout of surprise, and another shout as the gentlemen of the Queen's Guard permitted a woman carrying a child to pass into their midst where their Majesties were surrounded by the nobles.

“A boon, your Majesty, a boon, a boon,”

cried the woman, throwing herself upon her knees before the feet of the Queen's horse, and holding up her child—a bonnie bright-eyed girl—as if hoping by her appearance to strengthen the appeal for favour.

The Queen, with an exclamation of alarm for the woman's sake, pulled up her horse.

The woman, who had chosen this time for petitioning her Majesty, was dressed in black, and a thick veil covered her face, entirely concealing her features. The pure innocent face of the child, however, was uncovered, and its expression of sorrow, mingled with childish wonder at the sight she beheld, would have moved a colder heart than that of Queen Margaret. Her Majesty certainly was moved to pity, and the more strongly when the young King bent over his saddle, nodding and laughing to the little girl, who smiled sadly in response to his gaiety.

“My good woman,” said the Queen, not without a touch of kindness in her strong

voice, "you have chosen a strange time and manner of craving a boon from us."

"Alas, your Majesty, I had no choice of time or manner; but I implore your pardon if in this I have offended you, and I beseech you hear me."

"If you permit her to speak your Majesty will be detained here all day," said Angus, bending toward his Queen.

Margaret possessed much of the passionate nature of her brother, and all his impetuosity. Any appearance of restraint upon her actions, even by those whose counsels she valued, only urged her into doing what otherwise she might have left undone. At present she was anxious to show herself gracious in the eyes of her people, and would, therefore, in any case, probably have conceded the boon craved by the veiled woman: but the moment Angus attempted to advise her to negative the appeal, she decided to hear it. So, she said graciously—

"Speak on, my good woman; let us

know your wishes, and if they be in accordance with law, or require only an extension of charity to you or yours, I promise in the King's name that your boon shall be granted, inasmuch as we love our people."

Those of the crowd who were near enough to hear these gracious words waved caps and hands tumultuously, and raised the cry—

"Long live the Queen—long live the King!"

Those who were not near enough to learn what was passing divined that it was something pleasant, and caught up the cry of their neighbours with quite as much enthusiasm as if they had known the whole matter.

"The law is sometimes cruel, my liege, sometimes even unjust," said the petitioner in a broken voice, "and therefore I appeal to your gracious pity; I cry for charity to this poor child and to a mother husbandless."

Queen Margaret bent forward.

“Rise, and speak on.”

The woman obeyed.

“Dear lady, I see that there is pity in your face,” she continued with cheerful voice, “and I pray the sacred mother, that since your heart has opened in charity to listen to me, that I may have the strength to win from it the shelter that we need.”

“What is your peril?”

“My honour and my life are perilled by a man whose evil power has driven me from my home, and left this child and me dependent—beggars. All that, my liege, I think we could have borne; but our name has been unjustly turned to scorn, my dead husband’s honesty traduced, and himself condemned to shame that envelopes his memory and his child and I in a cloud so black that we never dare raise our heads again in the eyes of leal men and women. Oh, my dear lady, you who loved your husband, you who love your bonnie bairn, our King, you will not deny me pity, for I know your tender heart, which once held

some regard for me ; and I cry upon you in the sweet name of the Virgin Mother to grant me the protection of your strong arm till I can show how very much my husband's truth has been maligned."

"His name ? "

"My liege, I——"

She faltered and was silent.

"Unveil," said her Majesty, imperatively ; "unveil and let me see your face. Till then I promise nothing."

Trembling, and with a lingering terror at her heart, the woman raised her thick black veil.

"Margaret—Lady Spens," exclaimed the Queen, not in astonishment, but rather as one convinced of a suspicion.

Upon the instant there rose a murmur in the crowd, a murmur that gradually swelled with exclamations of rage and reprobation, a murmur that boded evil to the poor lady of Spens and to her child.

At the first sound of that savage murmur of the populace the frightened lady, with a

pale terrified look of appeal toward the Queen, clasped her child tightly to her breast.

"What," cried Angus darkly, "the wife of the attainted traitor, Walter Spens of Halstane?"

"Ay, my lord," responded the lady, flushing crimson, and even in that moment of peril unable to subdue her indignation, "the wife of Walter Spens; but he was no traitor, attainted though he be."

"He is condemned," said the nobleman, sternly.

"But falsely, falsely condemned," cried the wife, addressing the Queen. "My liege, my liege, he loved you and your house, and perished fighting for your cause. I do not know by what mischance he has fallen under this suspicion of his truth; but I do know that he is innocent. Grant me a few months—a few weeks—of your protection from my enemies and I will show his truth, or, failing, yield to you my life."

Her eyes brightened, her face glowed, and

her voice rose in the earnest enthusiasm of her appeal. The conviction of truth shone upon her fair face and rung in the sad, almost solemn intonations of her voice.

“He is condemned, I say, and this is no place for his defence. Captain Lindsay, I give this lady to your charge.”

But neither Captain Lindsay nor any of the gentlemen of the Guard made the least motion of obedience to the earl’s cruel command.

“Mercy, mercy,” cried the lady desperately, and grasping the rein of the Queen’s horse. “When our late good King summoned his subjects to follow him to the field my husband was the first to join him. At Norham, at Etall, at Wark, he fought beside his master. When the false Lady Heron of Ford had betrayed the King, Walter Spens was the first to discover her treachery, and risked his life to save that of his master. Surely, surely, my dear lady, you cannot think that this was the man to be false to the King whom he

served so faithfully, and whom he loved so dearly."

"I pray your Majesty, push forward," said Angus sharply, "and leave the woman to be examined by the Lords and Council. Advance, gentlemen."

"Hold," cried the Queen, impetuously. Then haughtily to the earl—"You forgot, my lord, to await my authority for the command."

"Pardon, your Majesty," said Angus, biting his lip, "but there is no time to wait. Harken to the cries of the people; their hot blood is up, and the woman's life will be sacrificed to her foolhardiness. Let her be taken to the Palace, where you can examine her at leisure."

However sternly Angus had treated the lady's appeal, his warning was certainly in her favour, for by some strange means her name had been caught by the crowd, and the opprobrium with which it was regarded roused angry feelings in the breasts of many and ruffled the tempers of all. They be-

came impatient, their impatience grew, they became boisterous, and at length when they saw Margaret Spens grasp the Queen's rein a yell of execration broke from them.

"Down with the traitor's wife," cried one; and the words were caught up and carried to the limit of the crowd.

"Death to the traitor's wife," cried another, and these words too were caught up and thrown about until the people swayed to and fro with a terrible meaning in their fierce cries and furious gestures.

The indignation of the mass became concentrated into one word—

*"Death!"*

There was a wild motion amongst those of the people who were nearest to the object of dislike.

A body of men broke from the mass and rushed furiously toward the lady, forgetting in their passion all respect for the presence of the Queen, or perhaps fancying that they were about to display the extent of their loyalty.

Before the gentlemen of the Guard could interpose to save her, the self-appointed delegates of the people had seized the lady and were dragging her away from the presence of the Queen, to whose rein she clung despairingly.

“Back,” cried the Queen, imperiously, her eyes flashing irefully; “back, every one of you, or you shall answer for it with your lives.”

“She is guilty, she is guilty!” cried the men, persisting in their attempt to carry off the lady.

“How, gentlemen,” cried the Queen, glancing fiercely around her, “are we so poorly guarded that the rabble may with impunity forget the respect due to us? Fie upon you. Are you such poor men that you would see a woman murdered in your presence and raise no hand to help her? Upon them, I say: beat them back, and let their own rashness bear the consequences of what ill-hap may befall them.”

Before these indignant words of the

Queen had been concluded the gentlemen of the Guard advanced upon the people, with drawn swords beat them back, and then formed a bulwark shielding the intended victims.

“On to the Palace,” commanded the Queen, “and let Mistress Spens go with us.”

One of the gentlemen of the Guard lifted the child on to his saddle-bow, and the lady stood beside the horse. Then the royal party moved hastily onward to Holyrood amidst the dissatisfied murmur of the populace.

“Courage, lady, courage,” whispered the guardsman, bending towards Mistress Spens; “her Majesty will befriend you, do not fear.”

The unfavourable termination of the morning's ride had not left the Queen in the most amiable mood desirable. She was vexed with the people, vexed with Angus, and perplexed by Lady Spens. So she had her robes changed with unusual speed, and summoned her nobles to attend her in the

King's cabinet. She was impatient to have the matter settled, and she had scarcely taken her seat when she spoke brusquely.

"My lords, you can divine the business upon which I have thus hastily summoned you. Speak freely, then, for we desire your counsel."

There was silence. None of those present seemed anxious to be the first to offer an opinion. At length, Douglas—

"Since none other will advise your Majesty I must speak. The lady whom your good heart, I see, is disposed to shelter is the wife of a man condemned by your lords in council of the blackest treason. First, under his direction Surrey was enabled secretly to obtain the vantage ground which lost us Flodden; and second, by his machinations our King has been carried away—murdered, most like. The proofs of his guilt have been examined with due care, and upon them sentence has been pronounced. Your Majesty cannot, in the

despite of their lordships' judgment and of the people's voice, revoke that sentence."

"I did not seek to know, my lord, what I could not do, but what I should do," said the Queen, sharply.

Angus moderated his tone as if conscious that he had spoken too boldly.

"I desire only to help your Majesty to a conclusion that may be in accordance with law and with the wishes of your people."

"Proceed."

"I have said the proofs of the guilt of Sir Walter Spens were so convincing that he was condemned by the Council, and even those of their lordships who had known the man and regarded him favourably could not gainsay the justice of the sentence. But more than that, there were matters laid before us which implicated this lady in her husband's crime, and orders for her arrest have been issued. Upon all this your Majesty must see that, as Regent of Scotland and guardian of its laws, you

have no other course to follow than to hand this lady over to their lordships to be dealt with by them as they may think just and right."

"You have done?"

"I have said, my liege, what I have thought my duty and my love to you required."

And the earl, bowing low, withdrew a pace. The Queen turned to Hamilton.

"My lord of Arran, you may help to solve this riddle."

The rival earl inclined his head, and with a blunt honesty of expression—

"Not I, my liege, for in troth I am no reader of riddles, even of the plainest sort. I lack the subtility of his lordship of Angus. You will do with the lady and her bairn as may best please your Majesty: but this I say, for many years her goodman was a faithful servant to our King, and I for one do not credit the proofs we have had of his treachery. I have said."

At a signal from the Queen the door

opened and Lady Spens was conducted into the chamber by two gentlemen of the Guard.

Behind her Majesty's chair stood the dark-eyed Mistress Douglas. Her soft lips were compressed, and she regarded the accused lady with an expression in which was mingled pity and suspicion. The suspicion did not bear upon the question of her complicity in the crime charged against her husband; it seemed, however, to have some association with the tall, well-made gentleman who stood beside Mistress Spens, and who had brought her to the Palace. The gentleman was Gilbert Elliot.

Just as the lady was entering, and whilst all eyes were fixed upon her, a page hastily whispered something in the ear of Angus, who replied with one word, and the page retired.

The Queen spoke with dignified calmness to the kneeling lady.

“Margaret Spens, you have thrust your sorrows upon my attention when they

should have been carried to those who have the administration of the law in their hands. I am disposed to be merciful; but to the wife of a condemned traitor, to the wife of a man who has been found guilty of falsehood and treachery to his master, our sovereign—my husband—I must be just before I can be pitiful. Therefore I must deliver you to the safe keeping of the lords in council to be dealt with as they may deem just.”

A low moan of pain escaped from Lady Spens as she covered her pale face with her hands.

The Queen advanced slowly to her, and to the amazement of every one attempted to raise her kindly from her kneeling posture.

“But as Margaret Barras and Spens, my friend, my companion, and my follower, I prove how well I have remembered you by promising that for eight weeks from this day you shall live under my protection to go and come as you list. At the end of that period I trust you shall have found the

proofs that will cleanse your husband's honour of the black stain now resting on it. But, whether you have found them or not, I must then complete my duty to the State and resign you to other hands. Rise now ; for a little while we are friends again."

Lady Spens could only grasp the hands which were given to her in token of protection and friendship, and kiss them with tearful gratitude.

The unexpected termination of an address which had begun so ominously took all present by surprise—a surprise as happily appeared for the most part to have given satisfaction, although one or two countenances expressed doubt of the propriety of what had been done.

"My lords," said her Majesty as she was about to retire, "I trust you will make known my pleasure in this matter ; and for the time I have mentioned I will be bounden for this lady's safe keeping."

"I pray you, my liege, hear this matter to an end," broke in Angus, hastily.

"I have heard enough for the present, and I have spoken my will."

"None here can pity the lady's position more than I—none would be more willing to help her to her desire—but justice must be done. The accuser of her husband and herself is within call——"

"Ha, say you; let us see the man."

"First let this be understood, that I have promised him safe passage."

"Concerning that we will speak after."

"He carries also the safe passage of the Council; for, to avoid the evil that might follow upon the revelation of his crime, his person must be unknown, unless your Majesty will consent to see the man in presence only of their lordships."

"Bring him hither, I say," was the impatient ejaculation of the Queen; "by my sooth, my Lord Angus, it seems that you would have your behest and not mine followed."

"Your Majesty shall be obeyed."

The earl made a sign to one of the pages,

and presently a man entered whose dress of coarse materials would have indicated that he belonged to the peasantry, but whose bearing was firm and bold as that of one accustomed to jack and saddle. His face was covered by a cloth mask, and, as if to conceal it as he knelt before the Queen, he bowed his head down low.

The Queen turned from him with a certain degree of contempt in her manner.

“My Lord Arran, question the fellow.”

“Speak, sirrah,” said Arran, gruffly; “what proof have you of this accusation?”

“The proofs, your lordship knows, have been already given to the Council.”

“Then what seek you here?”

“This only—that to satisfy all men I have spoken honestly, I denounce, in the Queen’s presence, Spens of Halstane a traitor to his King and country; and swear that I hold full proof that his lady was aware of his treachery. On this I stake my life, and will uphold my words in the lists against any man the lady may find bold enough to defend her cause.”

"My liege, my liege," cried Lady Spens, hastily, "this is——"

"Hush—let us hear the end."

"I take your challenge for my lady's sake, liar and villain though you be."

The accuser sprang to his feet and turned fiercely upon the speaker.

It was Gilbert Elliot who had advanced from his position near the door and stood confronting the accuser.

"You speak bravely enough," said the latter, sneering.

"And, with the saints' help, will do what I say. Walter Spens of Halstane is innocent of all thought or word or deed of treachery, and his lady is blameless as the Queen herself. In this fellow who denounces them behold Adam Scott of Tushielaw."

As he spoke he plucked the mask from Tushielaw's face.

"Fiends burn you!" muttered the Borderer below his breath.

"Tushielaw," continued Gilbert calmly,

“the riever, outlaw, and murderer, who seeks to shield himself from the consequences of his guilt by casting the blame upon innocent shoulders. I denounce him here before your Majesty and your lordships, and I am ready when and where you list to prove my words upon his body.”

“Agreed,” cried Tushielaw.

“To-morrow, then, let this matter be decided,” said the Queen.

Accompanied by her ladies, and taking Lady Spens with her, the Queen withdrew.

Tushielaw bowed to the nobles and seemed anxious to retire. Arran stopped him.

“Stay, Scott; you must find some one who will be surety for your appearance to-morrow.”

“You need not fear that I will fail.”

“Natheless, we must have the surety.”

“My Lord Angus, then, will answer for me.”

“Angus?” exclaimed Arran, raising his heavy eyebrows; “is this so, my lord?”

“I will answer for him,” said Angus

curtly, as he wheeled about and retired, followed by Tushielaw.

“For you, Master Elliot, we do not doubt that, as a gentleman of the Queen’s Guard, you will fulfil your engagement.”

Gilbert saluted their lordships, and quitted the chamber.

There were only five gentlemen left in the cabinet, Lord Patrick Lindsay (the lawyer), Arran, and three others.

“What think you, my lords,” said Lindsay in a low voice, “of our lady’s bearing toward Angus now? Was there anything of the lover, think you, in aught she did or said?”

“Much,” replied Arran, bluffly. “She likes not his forward efforts to assume authority; but, by my hand, not one of us dared have crossed her humour so often as he has done to-day without having been dismissed on the instant.”

“And note you,” commented the wily Archbishop of Glasgow (Beaton), “note you how with all the temper wherewith she

spoke to him, his wish was carried in the end. Soothely, gentlemen, the thing is clear, she checks him bravely in our presence only to hide the favour she yields him in private."

The countenances of the nobles were dark as they separated, speculating upon the growing influence of the fiery grandson of Bell-the-Cat.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### CUPID'S PERPLEXITIES.

“ Love’s feeling is more soft and sensible  
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails :  
Love’s tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste ;  
For valour is not Love a Hercules,  
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides ?  
Subtle as sphynx, as sweet and musical  
As bright Apollo’s lute strung with his hair ;  
And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods  
Makes Heaven drowsy with the harmony.”

*Love’s Labour’s Lost.*

“ IF your hand fail you to-morrow your head will answer for it, mark you.”

“ My hand or sword has never failed me at a pinch yet, and if either fail me to-morrow I shall seek no better than that my head should answer for it.”

These words Gilbert heard as he was

passing along the principal corridor. The voices were those of Angus and Tushielaw ; and to avoid them he turned into one of the private passages. He had done this upon impulse, and, although he was uncertain as to his course, he hurried along, hoping to find some outlet to another part of the main corridor, or some staircase that might lead him to the court below.

But he found neither, and presently he began to grow confused by passages and doors and recesses. He thought of retracing his steps, for he now surmised that he was trespassing upon the private chambers of her Majesty and her ladies. As this suspicion grew upon him he became decidedly uncomfortable, and the more so when he discovered that he had paid so little heed to the way he had traversed that he was unable to retrace his steps with any certainty of the route.

He was perplexed, and the situation was awkward enough. Suppose he had got into the sacred quarters of the retiring

chambers of her Majesty's ladies, and, suppose he were to be discovered, what possible explanation could he make?

He was startled by the opening of a door. A lady came forth and tripped lightly along the corridor.

She had not observed the intruder, and just as Gilbert was thinking of hiding in the recess of one of the windows he recognized the lady.

“Mistress—my Lady Douglas.”

She looked up quickly, amazed. Her expression was not so bright and happy as usual, but when she perceived the look of profound perplexity and confusion which he wore she laughed merrily.

“Why, Master Elliot, what evil spirit hath wiled you hither?”

“Two minutes ago I would have called it the evil spirit of stupidity; but now!—I call it the lucky spirit of blunder since it procures me a sight of you.”

She did not seem to take the compliment in the same humour as she had received all

he said the day before, and now he began to observe that there was a degree of restraint in her manner, and that much of her gaiety if not all was assumed.

“I will be sworn, though, that you would have blest the spirit with more earnest goodwill had it procured you a sight of the fair lady in whose cause you do battle to-morrow?”

Gilbert flushed slightly, but he answered gallantly enough.

“I scarcely could have had more pleasure in meeting her than I feel at present.”

“That is what you say.”

“And what I feel, albeit I honour Mistress Spens deeply.”

“Honour her—you would say love her, would you not?”

He looked honestly into the depths of her clear searching eyes.

“I would, perhaps, if I had dared.”

Mistress Douglas tossed her pretty head proudly, and there was even a shade of

coldness in the expression which overspread her features.

“She is the wife of your benefactor, who lives still, perhaps.”

“Pray Heaven that he does,” he cried earnestly.

She was, as it seemed, a little surprised by his earnestness; and impulsively plucked a ribbon from her breast. Her first movement was as if she were about to present him with the favour, but with the same impulsiveness that she had taken it from her breast she stayed her hand, and began slyly to twine the ribbon round her fairy fingers. Coquettish? Yes, if you will, but there was something more than mere coquetry underlying all.

“Suppose her husband did come back, would you not be sorry?”

“Sorry?—ah, madam, if you knew with what reverence I regard him you would not ask.”

“Reverence deep enough and strong enough even to yield to him the woman you love?”

“If that were necessary even that would not mar my pleasure in knowing that he lived.”

“If that were necessary?” she repeated, fixing her eyes upon him searchingly.

He did not catch her meaning, and so answered blindly—

“I would do it—do you think me cold in saying so?”

“No, no,” she said slowly; “but since Mistress Spens is not your lover you will be all the happier should your friend still live. But say, whose favours will you wear to-morrow?”

The last sentence was added hastily as if she feared the answer the former words might have received, seeing that he flushed and looked awkward.

Women are surely inconsistent even to themselves; at any rate here was one who was so. She wished to know the nature of his regard for Lady Spens, and yet when she stood upon the threshold of the knowledge she desired she flew away from

it as a dove might be frightened away by the opening of the door under the eaves of which it had sought shelter.

“I did not think of favours, my lady ; but if you will let me wear yours I will try to be worthy of them.”

“Wear this, then, for me to-morrow.”

She gave him the ribbon, and he touched it with his lips. Then he hid it away beneath the breast of his doublet.

“I will wear it, and if I fall my last thought will be with you and with the poor lady to whose cause I shall have wrought such grievous wrong.”

Mistress Mary liked the promise, but she would have liked it better perhaps had the latter words been omitted.

She had not much time to think of this, however, for she was startled by the sudden appearance of her brother Angus, following a page. The surprise was reciprocal, and a dark scowl gathered upon the Earl's brow as he recognized Gilbert.

“I see the gentlemen of her Majesty's

Guard are privileged," he said sneeringly.

"Even as earls are sometimes," retorted his sister briskly, overcoming in an instant all the confusion with which she had first seen him approach.

His lordship's eyes kindled and his cold handsome face became darker than before.

"You answer sharply, mistress. But since you are sister of mine I would have you choose your gossips with a little more discretion."

"How, my lord——" broke in Gilbert sternly, and crimsoning to the roots of his hair.

At a signal of one of the lady's fingers he checked himself and was silent—silent even when Angus turned his cold eyes upon him contemptuously.

"I have my whims, brother, as you have, and since I owe this gentleman my life, one of my whims is to call him friend."

"Your whims, mistress, must have guidance; and since you hold your name

so lightly, I will see that the guidance is more strictly followed."

"My lord, my lord," interrupted Gilbert, "you forget that I am here whilst you speak thus to a lady."

"Nay, let him proceed: it is one of my brother's whims to show his strength upon the least provocation," cried the little lady, laughing gaily. "But to give you comfort, sweet brother, I will tell you that I am taking this gentleman to see the lady for whom he risks his life to-morrow. Come, Master Elliot, this way."

And laughing merrily, as if she had outwitted her brother cleverly with an excellent jest, she moved gracefully down one of the passages, followed by Gilbert. He followed, however, with an indecisive step, for he was not quite sure that he should take advantage of the stratagem which the cunning pretty head of his new friend had fallen upon to rescue him from the wrath of her brother. But it saved

her also, he thought ; and that thought was enough for him.

When they had got beyond hearing of Angus he spoke.

“ We seem to be moving away from the corridor, Mistress Douglas. Where are we going ? ”

“ You shall see.”

That was the only answer he could obtain, and his comprehension of the locality became rapidly more and more vague. At length his guide paused before one of the many doors in a long corridor.

She tapped gently, and upon being bidden to enter she opened the door, looked in, then motioned Gilbert to follow, and he found himself in the presence of Lady Spens and Alice.

The fair-haired little one ran up to him gleefully, holding out her pretty hands to him, the while her eyes brightened and her bonny young face was full of smiling welcome.

He kissed his young friend tenderly, and

whilst holding her to his breast with one arm—she availing herself of the opportunity to twist and knot his long hair—he gave the disengaged hand to Lady Spens.

Mistress Mary had taken her place by the window, and, pretending to be interested in something without, she with sidelong glances observed all that passed.

“You are sad, madam, and seem paler even than yesterday.”

“I did not know of to-morrow then, and therefore had so much less to fear.”

“You fear, then, that this villain will prove your cause a false one?”

“In the eyes of men he may; in the eyes of Heaven he cannot. But it is not that—I feel that your arm, nerved by a warm noble heart, will sustain the truth of the cause you defend; but, but——”

“But what, lady?”

“I scarce can answer you, for I scarce can comprehend the nature of my fears. Ah, Gilbert, my brother—for you are all

a brother could be to me—were you to die I think your death would rest upon me like a crime. I think that it would kill me.”

Gilbert held up the smiling child, and, looking at her, spoke.

“And you, my bonny Aly, how would you live with only old Andrew to care for you?”

Aly opened her big blue eyes and looked at him as if she were very wisely speculating upon the problem he had set before her.

“We couldn’t do without mamma,” she said, nodding her head and reaching over to make another knot in his hair.

Lady Spens rested her hand upon his arm, pressing it warmly.

“Thanks, Gilbert; that is all I can offer, and thanks seem so very poor when balanced against your great sacrifice. But I read the lesson you would teach, and I will follow it.”

“I’ll fight the stouter on the morrow, knowing that.”

“Then take you this. My husband gave it me and said it was a talisman to guard from harm the name of Spens. I give it you, and pray its virtue may appear now, if ever, since by your strength the honour of the name is to be maintained.”

She threw round his neck a chain of gold, to which was pendant a jewelled crucifix of rare value. He inclined his head in acknowledgment of the gift; when he did so she kissed him on the brow, resting her hands an instant upon his head as if in unspoken prayer she sought a benediction for him.

“You shall conquer,” she cried, with a glow of inspiration.

“I will,” he answered quietly, confident in his cause.

“Now, Master Elliot,” broke in Mistress Douglas with a degree of impatience, “I am ready to conduct you safely hence.”

“Thanks, thanks, I attend. Good-bye, Aly, my bonny lass. Good-bye, madam, until to-morrow, when you shall raise your

head with the noblest, when the honour of your husband shall be purified and shown to the world stainless as it ever has been."

He quitted the chamber, and presently was in sight of the main corridor. He clasped the dainty hand of his guide warmly.

"Farewell."

He seemed to wish to say more without being able to find words to say it.

"You say farewell to me," she said, a little coldly.

"I dare not say more."

"Dare not?"

"Or, if I dare, I would say only this—I would that I might love you as I feel you should be loved."

The hand he held trembled in his, and there was something humid glistening in the dark bright eyes.

"You are a riddle, Master Elliot," she said with affected gaiety—a gaiety which only showed the more plainly that something troubled her. "You are a riddle

which I fear my poor head will never be able to read. Adieu."

She snatched her hand away and hastily disappeared, leaving Gilbert with the thought that he too had found a riddle which he could not read. One thing, however, he knew, that he had never before seen sun and shade keep such close company as they appeared to do in the person of pretty Mistress Douglas.

Two men were standing in the dark at the head of one of the outside staircases on the Canongate side of the Netherbow Port.

"He stays at Mrs. Nicol's, in the Cowgate," said one.

"I'll find the place."

"Give him this note; it appoints a meeting at the Harestone on the moor."

"Weel?"

"He will follow you."

"An' syne, when he's there?"

"Strike him down as you would a fatted bullock."

“ Supposing the folk find him, will they no suspect ? ”

“ Chut—carry him to the Tower. They will not find him there.”

“ I’ll do your will.”

And the two men separated.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE TEST OF TRUTH.

“And a trumpet pealing wild and far  
’Midst the ancient rocks was blown,  
Till the Alps replied to that voice of war  
With a thousand of their own;  
And through the forest glooms  
Flash’d helmets to the day,  
And the wind was tossing knightly plumes  
Like pine-boughs in their play.”

MRS. HEMANS.

“YE’LL gang to see the sport the-day,  
neebor?”

“Certes, ay.”

The questioner was a wiry little sharp-faced weaver, with a cast in his eye which gave him a decidedly malicious expression of countenance, albeit the man was, in

sooth, one of the simplest, save in the matter of politics, whereon he was prepared to tackle the whole Town Council, Provost, Bailies, and all.

The respondent was a burly short-legged flesher, whose round jovial countenance would have suggested a jovial disposition, and would have been florid only the keen frosty air of the misty morning tinged it blue. He had an honest admiration for muscle in a man, just as he had an honest admiration for flesh on a bullock. Therefore he answered his neighbour's question with the tone of one anticipating a rare treat.

The place was the rackety jumble of odd picturesque wooden buildings lying against the Kirk of St. Giles, and known as the Luckenbooths. The light of the winter day had not dawned yet, but with the help of oil lamps and flickering candles the industrious citizens were already astir and putting their shops in order for the day's business. And as light after light

twinkled in the shops like glowworms in the dark the theme of gossip between neighbour and neighbour was the forthcoming combat between the champion of Halstane's lady and the unknown accuser of herself and husband.

The news of the trial had been passed from mouth to mouth, from hostelry to hostelry, on the previous evening, and the whole city was agog with the topic. Popular favour was all against the unfortunate accused, and all on the side of the unknown accuser. The fact of the latter concealing his name militated in no degree against his credit, for the rancour of kinsmen and followers was well understood, and no blame was attached to the man who attempted to avoid hereditary feud. Had any excuse for his reserve been needed it would have been found in the recent case of Sir Robert Ker of Fairniehirst, Warden of the Middle Marches, who having been murdered by three Borderers, his kinsmen persistently

followed the assassins for months until they had killed two of them, and only allowed the third (the Bastard Heron) to escape on crediting a report of his death.

So, the folks having gone to bed with the combat between them and their beads, wakened in the morning with it fresh in their memory. Thus the weaver—

“There’ll be braw sport, quotha.”

“I’m thinking sae, for a roystering sodger lad tauld me yestreen that the leddy’s champion is a Gentleman of the Queen’s Guard, and as stout a callant as ye micht wish to see.”

“Puir laddie, it mun be some silly notion o’ romance that’s made him ready to throw awa’ his life for sic a cause. It’ll be a lang day and a short ane afore ye catch me in sic like folly.”

“I would be bounden for ye to keep the peace mysel’, neebor—wi’ your hands at any rate,” answered the flesher with a big fatty guffaw; whereat the weaver body winced, thinking with some reason that

his manly courage was being called in question.

“I hope ye dinna think I’d hear mysel’ misca’d without knowing what for?”

He contrived, with the assistance of his squint, to look very fierce as he put the question.

“Nay, nay, ye’d haud your ain wi’ ony o’ us, gentle or simple, nae doot, nae doot,” responded the burly flesher patronizingly, and stretching his short legs as long as he could to raise his round body up to the hook upon which he was hanging his sign.

More might have followed upon this head, for the weaver was not easily to be put down so long as his tongue might defend his dignity; but the attention of the neighbours was attracted by the approach of a man from the direction of St. Mary’s Stair. An old man, whose dress was somewhat disarranged, and whose countenance expressed alarm enough to suggest that he had seen some unusual spectacle at the shrine of St. Mary in the

niche above the wall at the head of the stair.

He saw the flesher gazing at him curiously. He stopped and gripped the burly little man by the arm.

“Eh, eh, what’s like the matter wi’ ye, my man?” cried the flesher, wriggling in the iron grasp and striving to conceal his terror.

“Will they let me through the Port yet?”

“Gude sake, dinna grip sae hard—whatna Port?”

“That ane.”

He pointed in the direction of the Netherbow.

“Hu, ay, I think they will no object.”

“Are ye no sure?”

“I dinna ken—it’s near the time for the Port till open—it’s open, I think, but Deacon Simpson next door’ll tell ye a’ about it.”

The man released the flesher and dived into the next shop.

“Gude save’s, the man’s daft.”

“Ay, an’ I’m thinking ye werena jest sae ready till take your ain wi’ him as ye might hae been.”

“Hoots, man, wha wid harm a daftie?”

And the flesher disappeared within doors.

“What’s your name?” said the Deacon, in half-finished toilet, answering to the furious summons of the stranger.

“Andrew Howie.”

“What do you want?”

“Tae get till Holyrood.”

“Aye, man, what’s that for?”

“I maun see the Captain o’ the Queen’s Guard.”

“Im—possible.”

The word was pronounced with all the emphasis of official authority.

“Damn it, I mun see him,” cried Andrew, striking the counter with his clenched fist.

“Weel, I’m no the Captain o’ the Guard, and he doesna bide here.”

The Deacon retired into the depths of his shop, and Andrew, looking demented enough

to justify the flesher's observation, was about to leave.

The Deacon reappeared.

"Hey, my man, what for is't ye want till see the Captain."

"It's about the fecht that's to come off the-day."

A few minutes' conversation with the Deacon, and that worthy was seen by his neighbours scudding down the High Street with Andrew.

When they reached Holyrood daylight was beginning to break. They demanded to see the Captain of the Queen's Guard. The sentinels would not let them pass, answering that the Captain could not be seen till after the joust.

"I mun see him before it comes on," persisted Andrew.

He was again refused admission peremptorily. Andrew became obstreperous, the Deacon was explanatory; but, in spite of all, they were finally, much to the Deacon's indignation, both locked up in the guard-house.

The day advanced. The red winter sun shone coldly through the fleecy clouds of mist. The citizens were crowding to the scene of trial, burgesses, apprentices, and all were making a holiday on the occasion, and the corporation availed themselves of the opportunity to display their insignia. The waulkers (surgeons), barbers, skimmers, and furriers; the goldsmiths, hammermen, wrights, and masons; the tailors, baxters, fleshers, and cordiners; the websters and bonnet-makers—all were going to the fair with glee-expectant faces and loud-spoken jests. The craftsmen's wives and daughters, too—sonsy and lean—were of the merry-makers, and much shy wooing was achieved by the young folk, so that the gala had a better side than the sanguinary one to be witnessed within the lists.

The lists had been formed in the hollow beneath the Calton Hill and near Greenside Well. The spot chosen was almost the same on which a few years later was ridden the tourney to reach which, and to display

his hardihood before Mary of Guise, the hot-headed Earl of Bothwell urged his steed down the steep of Calton Hill.

Over the brow of the hill the people crowded, and beneath them were the soldiers from the Castle—the horse-troopers forming an outer square, the archers and arque-busiers the inner. A pavilion with a silken canopy studded with gold had been hastily raised early in the morning for the Queen Regent, the King, and Court.

Tents had been erected at the respective ends of the lists for the combatants, and all looked as if the event were to be merely some carpet tournament and not a dogged struggle between two men for life—a struggle, too, upon which hung the honour and life of a gentle lady and the fortune of her child.

There was certainly earnest purpose to give the contest zest.

A little while before the sun reached its meridian the loyal shouts of “Long live the Queen,” and “Long live the King,”

announced the approach of the royal party, and yet there had been no appearance of either combatant.

“Whar are the fechtters?” queries our pugnacious flesher.

“Whar ye wouldna like to be,” quoth gossip weaver, the cynic.

Below their Majesties and the Court, and on their left-hand side, was seated in the royal pavilion the pale-faced Lady Spens, with Alice on her knee. To the latter the sight was a rare one, and she enjoyed it amazingly in happy ignorance of its importance to herself and mother. Both were dressed in white, in token of innocence : the fate of the combat would decide whether or not these robes of purity were to be covered by the significant black gown which an attendant bore in readiness. She had received another token of her Majesty’s kindness in being permitted a place in the royal pavilion ; and here, pallid, beautiful, and sad, she waited the issue of her fate.

“Will your man come, my lord, think

you?" said Angus drily, looking at Arran.

"I do not doubt; are you sure of yours?" was the quick response.

"Surely, for yonder comes the—ruffian, if the term likes your lordship."

And as he spoke Tushielaw, accompanied by the giant Ding-a'-doon and the dwarf Hornie, rode up to the lists and entered his tent.

"I am glad of that," said Arran gruffly, "for it would have been a sorry sight to see my Lord Angus enter the field in the shoes of a petty Border riever."

The sun rose nearer and nearer to the meridian, and still the champion of Halstane had not arrived.

With a woeful aching eagerness the sad eyes of the poor lady were strained toward the city seeking vainly for the appearance of Gilbert. He was late—he was late, and the sun was passing on its way with such cruel haste. Why did he delay so?—he whose soul was devoted to the cause he

was that day to serve? Oh, he was late, strangely late!

There were other eyes than hers turned with eagerness toward the city: those dark eyes of Mistress Douglas. From her place behind the Queen she, too, watched for his coming, and impatient thoughts whirled through her mind, vainly seeking any plausible excuse for his delay. She could find none.

The boom of the heavy gun from the Castle proclaimed that the sun had reached its meridian, and even the Queen glanced quickly in the direction whence the champion should have arrived.

The Sheriff advanced into the lists and read the terms and cause of the trial by combat that was about to take place. Then the opponents were summoned to appear.

Tushielaw stepped forth from his tent answering to the designation of the "Unknown." He wore a mask upon his face and close-fitting garments of velvet and wool.

He advanced to the Royal pavilion amidst the shouts of the people, and made his reverence; after that he retired to his tent again.

The opponents were a second time summoned. Tushielaw rode out in complete armour, and then, resting upon his spear, waited in readiness for his antagonist.

“Will he never come?” moaned the lady, her heart growing sick with terror.

A third time Gilbert Elliot, Esquire, and Gentleman of the Queen’s Guard, was summoned by name. Thrice the trumpet sounded its challenge.

But Gilbert Elliot did not answer.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE ABBEY CHAPEL.

“ A noble temper dost thou show in this ;  
And great affections, wrestling in this bosom,  
Do make an earthquake of nobility.  
Oh, what a noble combat hast thou fought  
Between compulsion and a brave respect !  
Let me wipe off this honourable dew  
That silverly doth progress on thy cheeks.”

*King John.*

WHEN the last sound of the trumpet had died among the hills ; when the people, for a moment dumb with mingled disappointment of their sport, and wonder at the non-appearance of the lady's champion, let loose their voices in one loud shout of congratulation to the victor of the unfought field ; when the child-King, directed by

Angus, and little dreaming of the sad import of his act, threw down his truncheon—then Mistress Spens knew that it was all over, and that dishonour must rest upon her husband and his name for ever.

A cold hand of ice seemed to enclasp her heart, and, benumbed in limb and brain, she sat with hands closed spasmodically staring blankly before her.

The Queen, pale and excited herself, averted her gaze; she could not endure the speechless agony of the woman who, in happy days long ago, was her companion and friend.

The smooth white brow of Mistress Douglas was dark; her pretty mouth was compressed tightly; and her eyes burned angrily as they glanced from the single combatant in the lists to the condemned lady. Gloomy thoughts occupied her mind; gloomy doubts which were quickly driven away by still more gloomy fears.

“‘Sdeath,” muttered Arran, frowning, “there is something out of joint here.”

“The fellow has repented his rashness in championing a worthless cause,” suggested Angus, smiling coldly.

“By my sword, my Lord Angus, he is no true man who can smile at the ill-hap of yonder poor lass.”

Angus glanced towards the lady and the smile left his countenance. For once the quenchless thirst of ambition and all its attendant jealousies were forgotten in an honest impulse.

“You are right, Arran ; this is no jest, albeit I had a mind to treat it so.”

In truth, he had smiled rather at the discomfiture of his rival than with any thought of those who were to suffer the consequences of the mishap that had occurred.

Having waited his due time in the lists for his opponent, Tushielaw raised his lance from the ground, and touching his horse lightly with his heels cantered up to the front of the Royal pavilion.

The Queen rose to proclaim the decision

of the event. A stern expression overcast her masculine features, and none doubted what the decision would be.

The attendant with her black robe stood ready to throw it over the condemned, and the murmurs of the populace were gradually becoming subdued.

There was a movement amongst the gentlemen of the Guard which at this moment attracted attention. An old man was forcing his way amongst the horses. His head was uncovered, and his long iron-grey hair was tossed about his head and face by the wind. His look was wild and anxious, and he seemed to be indifferent to all danger and all awe of the august personages towards whom he was pushing his way. Several attempts were made to stop him.

“It’s the life o’ yon puir leddy and her bairn ye’re taking in stopping me,” he cried.

The look of anguish and the whole bearing of the man pleaded eloquently for him, and he was allowed to pass.

He reached Captain Lindsay, and presently the Captain advanced with him to the pavilion, holding in his hand a scrap of paper which Andrew had given him.

The attention of the Queen and her Court had been attracted by this unusual scene, and the business which was going forward was for an instant interrupted.

“Pardon, my liege,” said the Captain in his abrupt way, but with a degree of earnestness visible through his sharp cold manner—“pardon the boldness with which I present myself, but it concerns the business in hand nearly.”

“Speak on.”

There was a quick movement of her Majesty's brows as if she almost hoped that some explanation was about to relieve her of the necessity of pronouncing the verdict which, for the sake of the poor lady before her, she would fain leave unspoken.

Andrew Howie was kneeling beside the Captain with hands clasped and a look of pitiable appeal.

“This man,” said the Captain, “was the attendant of the deserter Gilbert Elliot, and he avers that there has been some treachery at work to cause the failure of the day.”

“Say you!—what treachery?”

“That is not known yet, my liege.”

“Upon what ground, then, does his suspicion rest, and toward whom is it directed?” queried Arran.

“Last night, my lord, when Master Elliot was preparing his armour for to-day’s encounter a messenger sought him at his lodgings and delivered him this epistle.”

The Captain handed the scrap of paper to Arran. His lordship looked at the document frowning.

“Where is some clerk to decipher these marks?” he said, gruffly looking about him for assistance.

“With your lordship’s leave,” said the Archbishop Beaton.

He took the paper and scanned it quickly.

“It is an invitation of a woman’s tracing,

your Majesty," commented the Archbishop, raising his heavy eyebrows suspiciously.

"Read, my lord."

*"If Gilbert Elliot will dare to follow he who bears this to the Place he will conduct him to, he will save one who loves him from grievous harm."*

"There are initial letters here," said Beaton, "but what they are passes my sight to say with surety. They are like M. S., and yet again like M. D."

"Say you, sirrah, what followed this," broke in Angus, addressing Andrew, the while he plucked his beard angrily.

He had a suspicion as to the real character of the doubtful initials, and he cast a sidelong glance upon his sister, but her face was inscrutable—it was wrathful, alarmed, and anxious all at once.

"Is it me your lordships want to speak?" gasped Andrew, excitedly.

"You heard the question."

"Ay, my lords and your Majesty, and I'll tell ye a' that happened when the chap cam'

wi' the paper. Maister Elliot looked dootfu' like and wasna for ganging. He asked the loon wha sent him, and he said a woman. Syne Maister Elliot swithered and lookit hard at the chap, and I prayed him for my leddy's sake no till risk his life in ganging he didna ken whar. 'I maun haste back to the leddy that sent me,' quo' the messenger, and turned about as if he was going to start his lane. 'Stop,' says Maister Elliot, 'I'll gang wi' ye, my man; but mind ye I carry a sword.' 'It disna matter a boddle to me gin ye carried twa,' said the chap, as brisk as ye like. When that was said Maister Elliot turned to me and gied me that paper. 'If onything happens, Andrew, to keep me awa frae here till the morning, ye'll ken that it's something by ordinar—in fact, if I am no in the lists the-morn an hour before noon ye'll ken that I am a dead man. Take this paper to Captain Lindsay, say there's been treachery at work, and ask him to find out its meaning.' 'Dinna gang,' I said, 'for ye risk my leddy's

life and honour as well as your ain.' But he took anither look at yon bit paper, syne pu'd his bonnet over his broos and gaed awa. I waited a' nicht and he didna come back; and this morning I came to the Palace yett, but the sodger wouldna let me in to see the Captain, and when I said I maun get in, he clappit me and a frien' into a black hole and keepit us there till jist a wee whylie syne, when an officer cam' and speered what we were doing there, and when I told him he let us out, and I cam' here to pray for help and justice. My lords and your Royal Majesty, it's no Maister Elliot's faut that he's no here the-day. It's because he's murdered."

"This matter must have further inquiry, my lords," said the Queen, flushing with anger. "Tell them the verdict on to-day's trial shall not be yet pronounced."

She did not even glance toward the man who was waiting to learn from her lips that his conduct that day had proved the truth of his assertions. She made a movement

indicative of her desire to leave the pavilion, which was promptly obeyed by the Court.

“Captain Lindsay,” said Arran darkly, “we shall require the attendance of yonder fellow at the Palace.”

He nodded toward Tushielaw, who sat upon his horse in the position in which he had expected to receive honour and congratulation, gnawing his lips beneath his mask, and in his heart cursing the ill-hap which had temporarily at least marred his triumph.

He was escorted from the lists by a couple of troopers.

When the people saw the Court rising, saw Lady Spens being taken away still in her white robes, and the victor under arrest—for, quietly as the arrest had been managed, it could not be entirely concealed—when they observed the confusion that prevailed, neighbour questioned neighbour as to the meaning of it all. Then voices rose in murmurs of dissatisfaction, and the murmurs swelled until they rolled

in restless waves against the heads of the Sheriffs and the Provost.

But these gentlemen had only a very hazy notion of the real nature of what had occurred; so when it behoved them to stem the tumult that was rapidly rising, and bidding fair to overwhelm them, the march of the soldiery was hastily stayed. There was riding and spurring hither and thither, and clamouring everywhere.

At length one of the Sheriffs was enabled to speak with a degree of confidence as to what had turned the current of affairs—that some foul play had been discovered, and that the Court would not deliver judgment until the whole matter had been properly sifted.

The people grumbled, and were disposed to have the hero of the day brought back to them, so that they might crown him with a victory, whether it was the Royal will or no.

Then the Sheriffs and Provost and Bailies altogether reminded the grumbling populace that, if they defied the Royal authority in

this instance, not one of their own lives would be safe, not a plack's worth of their property could be held securely for a single hour.

The weathercock crowd hereupon veered round to a reflection on its own interests, and, deciding that they were of more importance than the glorification of any hero under the sun, made no further effort to recall the Unknown, but grumblingly turned its steps homeward. Everybody was disappointed with the issue of the day, and everybody had a notion that he or she had been dragged out upon a raw winter morning to spend valuable time waiting for the sport of witnessing one man kill another, without having been indulged either in the promised spectacle or in his own humour.

When the dispersion took place, and the burgesses had re-entered the city, the short December day closed gloomily. In the Palace, lamps were lit, and blazing fires brightened the dark panellings and rich tapestry of the state chambers.

The investigation of Andrew Howie's statements was going forward. When it had closed, Tushielaw was permitted to go free on his own promise that he would appear again when summoned. The Queen had impetuously declared her determination to extend her protection to Lady Spens. Meanwhile exertions were to be made to discover the fate of Gilbert Elliot.

Verging upon midnight, a pale green light burned faintly in the abbey chapel—so faintly that the corners were thrown into deep shadow, and only a small space around the altar was illuminated. Aided by the profound stillness of the hour—a stillness interrupted by the occasional melancholy sigh of the wind, or a deep moan as some gust of more than usual strength beat upon the walls and passed on to the firth—the place possessed that air of mystery and solemnity which awes the heart of man, as if something in silence thrust upon him the consciousness of an invisible presence.

There was another sound heard in the mystic quietude of the sacred place—the subdued heart-bursting sob of a woman.

She was kneeling before the shrine of the Virgin, her pale face made ghostly in its pallor by the reflection of her sombre attire. Her white hands were crossed upon her breast, her head was bowed down, and again the pallid face was raised in dumb appeal to the Holy Mother; and always the choking sobs burst from her like the low moan of one dying in the desert.

She had been there for weary hours, seeking in prayer the consolation she so sadly needed; seeking in prayer assistance for the few friends she had yet left to her.

The faithful old servitor, Andrew, had promised to seek her in the chapel by midnight, and tell her what speed he had made in discovering the meaning of Gilbert's disappearance.

Alone in the cold and ghostly silence she waited for him, praying.

A low sough of the wind, and a gust blew

through the chapel as if some of the doors had been opened and closed noiselessly ; a light step upon the stone floor, and she raised her head, listening, without looking round.

Silence as profound as before prevailed. There was no footfall, no sound of breathing to indicate the approach of any one.

She trembled a little as with cold ; and, believing that her desire to see her messenger return had cheated her with the fancy that she had heard some one near, she addressed herself again to prayer.

A little while, and she was startled by a sound of some one drawing a long breath of pain. The sigh struck upon her ear so distinctly, that she could not this time dispel the fancy that another beside herself was in the chapel.

With trepidation she turned her head slowly towards the darkness. She could descry nothing, she could hear nothing.

“Andrew,” she breathed softly, the while she peered into the darkness in the vain

effort to discover some human explanation of the sound she had heard.

There was no answer, and the poor lady, pressing her hands upon her brow, shuddered at the thought that her afflictions were beginning to affect her mind.

She looked to the shrine again, with hands clasped tightly to subdue the emotions which were urging her to shriek aloud in affright.

Once again the strange sigh was heard, and this time it seemed to proceed from behind the hangings which decorated one side of the altar place.

But she only clasped her hands the more firmly, and did not raise her head. Her heart beat violently, and her pulse throbbed painfully. Her sense of hearing quickened, and the movement of a withered leaf upon the chapel floor assumed to her tense-strung senses the proportions of an enemy hovering around her.

She could almost have cried aloud for joy when she distinctly heard the side door

open, and a heavy step advancing toward her. This, at least, was human, and, friend or foe, she was glad of the arrival, for a visible danger is always preferable to an invisible one. But she knew the step. It was Andrew who approached her.

She turned quickly, and beheld a man in armour, with a deviceless surcoat.

His visor was closed, but something in the man's eyes, as they glistened upon her through the bars of the helmet, filled her with instinctive dread.

With a cry of alarm, she was about to fly from the place; but the man, with a certain amount of respect in his bearing, planted himself in her path.

She glanced around seeking some other way of escape; but she could not see any. She only became the more conscious that she was alone with this man, and beyond the power of her voice to summon assistance.

The man raised his mailed hand deprecatingly.

“You are alarmed, lady,” he said, in a muffled voice, and with an apparent effort to conceal its natural tone; “but there is no need—I came hither as your friend.”

“For what purpose?”

“To say that I know the hiding-place of Gilbert Elliot, and if it please you to accompany me, I will conduct you to him.”

“I go with you!”

The man bowed.

“On what assurance for my safety?” she asked, amazed by the proposition, and eager to learn something of the fate of her friend.

“My pledge that I will guard your life with my own.”

“Why does not Master Elliot come to me himself?”

“He cannot.”

“Is he wounded?”

“Yes.”

“Wounded?—dying, perhaps; and if he perish, then I and all that is dear to me must perish with him.”

“He can save you still if you will go to him.”

“And risk my life with you, of whom I know nothing?”

“I have pledged myself; and by the Cross, I think the gain to you is worth a greater risk than this.”

“It is—it is.”

“You will go with me, then?”

“One question more; when can I return?”

“At your own pleasure.”

“An hour hence, then, I will join you here.”

“That will be too late. You must go now.”

“Without one word of parting to my child; without——”

“What need of anything, since you can return by morning if it please you? Do not waste time when honour and life depend on speed. Come, this cloak will shelter you from the cold. Haste, haste.”

Half stupefied, and wholly bewildered,

she permitted herself to be led, or rather dragged, from the chapel by the strange friend.

As the door closed upon them a man sprang from behind the altar hangings, and hastily followed them. It was the Chevalier Night.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ENTOMBED.

“ The Destiny, minister general,  
That executeth in the world o’er all,  
The purveyance which God hath seen beforne,  
So strong it is that, tho’ the world hath sworn  
The contrary of a thing by yea or nay,  
Yet sometime it shall fallen on a day  
That falleth not oft in a thousand year;  
For certainly our appetites here,  
Be it of war, or peace, or hate, or love,  
All this is ruled by the sight above.”

CHAUCER’S *Knighte’s Tale*.

“ ALWAYS darkness, always darkness, and these hammers beating upon my brain.”

The words were spoken by a feeble voice, and weak arms were cast about, vaguely seeking something to clutch, something to comprehend in that impenetrable gloom.

“Cold, slimy stones—that is all.”

Tuck, tuck—tuck—tuck, tuck—and the feeble hands struck the stone floor, vacantly keeping time with the wild throbbing of the brain.

“Will I never hear a human voice again? will I never see the daylight any more?”

Tuck, tuck—tuck, tuck—vacantly played the hand upon the slimy stones as before. Then, with a sharp cry of pain—but low, as that of one whose strength had failed him even in despair.

“I think I shall go mad—go mad! . . . Am I mad just now? Holy Mother, help me.”

With the horrible suspicion which flashed upon his mind arose the prayer for deliverance, and with the prayer came the desire to live—the yearning to satisfy himself that he was not distraught, and to pierce the mystery which surrounded him.

“Let me think”—the voice was calmer now. “What place is this, and how am I in it? Ah! my memory serves me. The

night before the trial with Tushielaw—the false letter—the villain wiled me to the Borough Moor, and in the darkness struck me to the earth before I had time to raise a finger in my own defence. I remember all that; but the rest is blank, utterly.”

He sought in vain for some clue to the passage of time, and to the identification of the place in which he had awakened from unconsciousness.

“Is the day of trial over? Oh, black shame to me and to my lady if it be! . . . There is time yet, perhaps—saints of heaven, give me strength.”

He attempted to rise; but his limbs were cold and stiff, and the effort only seemed to make him the more conscious of his weakness. Then the truth suggested itself to him. He must have lain in this strange place many hours—days, perhaps—insensible from the effects of the assault upon him by his treacherous guide and the companions of the villain. Having felled him, they had carried him to this dungeon, and

left him there under the impression that he was dead.

A pain like a sharp cry of anguish shot through his heart and brain as this occurred to him. They had removed his body beyond the reach of discovery ; and, so long as their guilt could not be brought home to them, they cared not whether they had killed him outright or only stunned him. They would not return to look at him : they had left him there to perish miserably of hunger and thirst.

Who were his enemies ?

Not merely plunderers ; for the golden crucifix—the amulet given to him by Lady Spens—was still suspended round his neck.

As he lay with these thoughts and questionings flitting through his mind, and filling him with an intensity of agony, he became aware of the sound of rushing water. At first he gave this no heed ; but as one tossing upon a sleepless pillow unconsciously, as it were, gives up thought to the simplest things—as the counting of the

ends of fringe upon the curtains, or the tick of a clock, or the half-imbecile repetition of certain figures—so his mind was gradually withdrawn from its troublous speculations by the sound of the water.

He became feverishly interested in it, and he listened for it, till at length he discovered that the water flowed beneath the flooring with a hollow gurgle as if it were passing through a tunnel or cavern.

This fact discovered, the fever subsided into a drowsy interest in the sound. Dreamily he listened, and his thoughts were borne away with the stream to mossy woods and dells; the fair faces of Mistress Spens and Mary Douglas dawned upon him, and he forgot the darkness of the living tomb in which he lay. It seemed as if his spirit had already parted from the body and escaped from the prison, so dull and vacant became his sense of all that surrounded him.

A footstep upon the stone passage without.

Only a few minutes before, his feeble pulse

would have quickened at the sound, and his blood would have leapt with hope. He did not heed it now or seem to understand it.

The bolts of the door grated harshly as they were withdrawn from their sockets.

Still he listened only to the murmuring water, and dreamed of the liberty from which merely those stone walls separated him, and which was yet so far away.

As the door slowly turned on its hinges a ray of light streamed into the place, disclosing a somewhat large chamber, with bare walls embrowned by age and glistening with moisture.

The eyes of the prisoner were pained by the light, and closed by a simple twitch of the nerves, not by any will of the man.

Heron Barras, in the friar's gown, to which he seemed to be partial, with the cowl drawn over his head, stood in the doorway, shading a lamp with his hand, and peering over it. He scanned the chamber with one of his broad grins upon his face, and presently his eyes were fastened upon

Gilbert. The grin—which one would have at first glance taken as indicative of a jovial nature, indifferent alike to intrigue and restraint, but which upon being examined became rather unpleasant to meet—broadened as he saw how still the unlucky Gentleman of the Guard lay upon the floor.

“Dead?” he muttered, as he advanced slowly. “That cheats me of my debt.”

He peered over the prostrate form, peered into the wan, haggard face, and presently knelt down like a ghoul gloating over a corpse.

“Humph! there is colour upon the lips and in the cheeks.”

He placed his hand on Gilbert’s breast; and the grin now became one of entire satisfaction.

“He lives. So, he can suffer still. This will be a dainty feast, and—what’s here?”

His eye had caught the little golden crucifix, and setting the cruzie upon the floor he quietly removed the amulet from the helpless man’s neck.

The eyes of Gilbert had opened a little now: but he understood nothing yet of what was passing, and not a limb stirred.

Barras examined the symbol, and the smile gradually faded from his countenance, leaving it eager and sinister. He fingered the cross nervously until it broke in twain, as if it had been two crosses fastened cunningly together.

“By the mass, it is as Tushielaw hinted—there was a marriage, and there is an heir.”

His hand closed fiercely upon the two halves of the cross. Whatever had been revealed to him by the opening of the amulet it had brought forth the darkest passions of his nature. He hated this man for the overthrow by him of his scheme that night in the round chamber of Tushielaw. For that alone he would have taken dire vengeance had opportunity permitted. But he had found cause now not only to desire the destruction of Gilbert Elliot, but to seek it in the teeth of every obstacle.

He gazed down upon the motionless form of his enemy and observed that his eyes were partly open. At this he was slightly startled, but immediately he laughed a harsh sneering laugh at his own alarm.

“*Benedicite*, Master Elliot ; your friends told me you were dead, and I came to say a prayer for your rest. Was it not kind ?”

Gilbert heard, but the voice sounded to him like voices in a dream, distant and vague ; and, as in a dream, he had no power to make response. His eyelids wavered, however, and opened a little wider than before.

He felt the hot breath of the man burning upon his cheek, as the sinister face was brought close to his.

“ You hear ? ”

Gilbert’s lips moved, but they gave vent to no sound.

“ But you cannot answer. It is better so, perhaps ; for you can never leave this dungeon with life. Your arm was strong—you proved that on my body ; and I hated

you for it. But more—your life stands between me and fortune, and I hate you for that, too.”

The helpless one groaned faintly.

“Aha, I have reached your heart at last. You close your eyes; I am not pleasing to them. Well, that is a pity; but we all of us have our humours. I shall not trouble you long. Hearken this: you will live two days maybe—four days if you touch the food I leave for you. But every hour you add to life is only so much added to the lingering agony of your death. Farewell. Look upon me before I go, for mine is the last face your eyes shall rest upon in this world.”

With the fiendish intent of adding to the dying anguish of the victim, Barras placed within his reach a flask of wine and several bannocks. He left the light, too, that the torture of watching it flicker and fade might increase the horrors which already filled the place.

A sickly shudder passed over the weak

frame of the prisoner as he heard the door close and the bars rattle, shutting him out for ever from the world. He gazed upon the grim damp walls which seemed to lower and frown upon him; and out of the dark corners came flickering shadows, mocking his misery.

There was nothing for him now but to die as speedily as possible.

He saw the wine and bread.

“They are devils and not men who have me in their power,” he groaned.

He tried to withdraw his gaze from the food for which his stomach craved; for to yield to the temptation was only to prolong his pain. He turned his head away, and fought with hunger stoutly. He strived to fix his thoughts upon higher things; he muttered prayers for the speedy coming of his deliverer—Death. He recalled the form and visage of the poor lady and the bonny bairn whom he had disgraced; he remembered dark-eyed Mary Douglas and the token she had given him

—but in spite of all his efforts the mind only wavered over every subject and would settle upon none. Through all, the consciousness that food was within his reach prevailed.

His mouth became dry, his lips burned, and his thirst grew unbearable. He became frenzied with physical and mental pain; and the tempter argued with him.

“Assuage your thirst; that cannot delay the end you pray for.”

“If I yield now all that I have endured must be endured again.”

“Drink, and fear nothing.”

“I dare not.”

“The wine is poisoned perhaps.”

He was startled by the suggestion of his frenzied brain, and turned his head quickly to gaze again upon the food.

“It may be poisoned, it may be poisoned—they would not risk the prolongation of my life since they have so much cause to desire my death.”

His head was racked with pain, his

temples throbbed, and with a faint savage cry he grasped the wine-flask.

He paused, attracted by the sound of voices without.

Had they come to make sure of their work at once?

There was a loud rumble as if a number of stones had been thrown down in front of the door. Then followed knocking and trampling about; the clink of trowels, the murmur of voices, and a sound of general bustle.

There was no attempt to open the door. Who were they? What were they doing?

Friends, perhaps, come to rescue him.

He drank, and the flavour of the wine was inexpressibly delicious.

Another rumble as of stones being thrown down in front of the door. He quaffed again, and he seemed to feel the current of life surging through his veins, quickening his pulse, and filling him with strength and hope.

“Am I so poor of wit,” he questioned, in

the hilarity of his new-found strength, "that I will meekly resign hope because these varlets have trapped me? No, by the Holy Rood, no!"

He drank again.

The knocking, the tramping, the clink of trowels, and the murmur of voices continued without, and the louder they grew the more life was revived in Gilbert's heart, and the more forgetful of the horrible purpose for which food and drink had been left with him in his dungeon.

He had raised himself upon his elbow. He drank and now he ate voraciously, forgetful of everything.

When he had finished, the wine had so far affected his weak condition that he was more than half-intoxicated, and possessed an unnatural strength. Laughing defiantly at the thought of his captors' disappointment when they should find that he had lived long enough to be rescued by his friends—he never asked himself who were the friends whom he expected to aid him—he struggled to his feet.

The bustle and noise without proceeded.

He moved unsteadily to the massive oaken door, and, leaning upon it, listened to what was going on.

It was some time before, from sounds and words, he grasped the meaning of the work. When he had grasped it he staggered backward, horrified.

They were building up the doorway—entombing him alive!

## CHAPTER XVII.

## LOST OR SAVED.

*“Claudio.* Death is a fearful thing.

*Isab.* And shamed life a hateful.”

*Measure for Measure.*

WHEN the hideous truth had flashed upon him it was like the sudden revelation of despair to one whose heart is buoyant with hope. It was like a giant's blow, and it stunned him even in his intoxication.

He leaned against the wall confused and horror-stricken, pressing his hands upon his head. For the first few minutes every sense was numbed. By-and-by he became conscious of the noise outside, and every blow struck seemed to rebound upon his brain, every clink of the trowels seemed to echo in his breast with a terrible import.

All his drunkenness was dispelled, and as one by one his numbed senses were quickened they intensified his affliction by a full knowledge of his position. In a few hours the doorway would be built up and egress by that way rendered impossible. The only thing in the shape of a window was a small square hole near the roof, which was scarcely six inches broad, and served rather to display the thickness of the walls than to give light or air. An abrupt cessation of the noise without attracted his attention.

He hastened to the door, and placing his ear against it listened intently.

Men were talking in low smothered voices. They were relenting, perhaps.

The feeble hope made his pulse leap and flutter incontinently. But the hope was so very feeble that it could not retain possession of his mind for more than an instant.

The men were moving away from the place. What could it all mean? The question was answered by the last words he

heard distinctly. They were going for more stones to complete the work.

Despairingly he dashed himself against the door. It was firm as a rock, and the effort he had made did not even shake it. With a sharp frenzied cry he endeavoured to sink his nails into the woodwork. He had not asked himself why, else he would not have attempted it.

“Whisht ye, whisht ye,” cried a strange voice from without, “they’re no oot o’ hearing yet, and if ye mak’ an ado ye’ll jist bring them a’ back again.”

“Who are you?”

“A frien’.”

“Will ye get me out of this?”

“I’ll try.”

“Open the door, then?”

“No the noo. Ye hae gart thay chappies stop an’ they’re standing up the passage a wee bit, waiting to see what’s the matter.”

“What place is this?”

“Tushielaw Tower—dinna speak sae loud.”

“Who brought me here?”

“Yetholm Will and Eddie Craig.”

“When?”

“Three days syne.”

“For what purpose?”

“To get ye out o’ the road, I expeck.”

“Cowards and villains.”

“Nae doot; but ye see ye micht hae worried Tushielaw, and that would hae been muckle against his pleasure. Sae he thocht it would be better to remove the possibility and syne had ye trapped and brought here.”

“The ruffian feared the falsehood of his cause.”

“Feared?—ye’re wrang for ance; he wouldna be feared o’ the deil himsel’; only that time wi’ ye he wanted to make sure.”

“Then why does he fear to give me a chance for life?”

“It’s no him that’s burying ye.”

“Who, then?”

“Mess Simon.”

“Heron Barras, you mean.”

“That’s jist the man.”

“Why is his hate so bitter that he dooms me to such a fate as this?”

“He wants to be Lord of Binram.”

“What matters that to me?”

“Eh—do ye no ken what?”

“I cannot guess.”

“Hooly, but that’s queer. Weel, it seems that if truth were kenned an’ everybody had their ain, ye would be Lord of Binram.”

“I!—impossible.”

“May be sae; but Tushielaw kens it, an’ Mess Simon thinks it, and sae ye’ll hae to suffer for’t whether it’s possible or no.”

“On what ground does he suspect this?”

“Wha—Mess Simon? Mainly frae hints he has gotten frae the master, and partly frae a cross that he found round your neck the-nicht.”

“How does the cross connect me with the house of Binram?”

“The cross opened in two and there was something writ inside o’ it.”

“They are mistaken again, then, for that

cross was only given to me as an amulet by Lady Spens on the day before the trial with Tushielaw."

"Whist ye—they're coming back."

There was a pause—a pause of painful suspense to Gilbert.

Then the friendly voice without—

"No, they hae turned up the stair and are awa'. Stand back."

The door was cautiously pushed open, and the prisoner saw how near death stood to him. The doorway was a little more than half built up with large whin stones.

On the top of this rough but strong wall was perched Hornie the dwarf, his mischievous face expressing the glee with which he was filled at the idea of the trick he was about to play Mess Simon. There was a grain of seriousness, though, in his expression, for all his manner of simple hilarity, and his big queer eyes moved restlessly between the cell and the passage.

Odd and ugly as the dwarf was, Gilbert had never been greeted with a welcomer

sight, and he gratefully grasped the little man's legs—not being able to take his hands, which were at that moment occupied, one supporting him in his position, the other holding a light—with all the strength he possessed.

“Hooly, frien', hooly, if ye haud me that way I'm thinking my bane's 'll be sare.”

“You have saved me.”

“No jist exactly yet. I'm trying, though; an' I managed to draw oot the bottom bar afore they biggit ower it. But come on—can ye loup this?”

“Yes, if you go down.”

The dwarf dropped to the ground.

Gilbert rested his hands upon the wall and sought a resting-place for his foot. He raised himself, and reached his head over the wall into the passage. At that instant lights flashed in his eyes from the farther end, and Hornie's voice sounded warningly in his ears.

“Back, back an' shut the door—they're coming again—lean a' your weight against

the door so that they'll think it's steekit. Haste ye—I'll get them awa' again."

Gilbert slipped back into his cell, and, scarcely knowing what he was about, closed the door and leaned against it as directed.

Then came the tramp of heavy footsteps, the rumble of stones as they were thrown down, the murmur of voices, and the clink of trowels.

"Ye hae got back quick," said the dwarf presently, his loud voice rising above all other sounds.

"We haena got muckle time to spare," answered a gruff voice.

"Weel, ye're no wasting a great deal. How long will it take you to finish the biggin?"

"Less nor half an hour."

"An' how long will it be before the wa' grows ower hard to be knockit doon by a strong man?"

"I'd let the strongest man born try to ding't doon the minute we hae finished, an' I'd gie him my head if he managed it."

“What way can that be?”

“It’s a secret, but I dinna mind telling ye—we jist wedge the stanes sae tight thegither that they would stan’ without lime.”

“Let me try them noo.”

“Ye—ho, ho, ho!”

And there was a general laugh at the proposition of the dwarf. The work ceased, and the boastful masons, contemptuously regarding the deformity of Hornie, permitted him to try his strength. The laugh suddenly changed sides as the long arms of the dwarf dragged down a portion of the newly built wall.

“Haw, haw, haw!” bellowed Hornie, in ecstasies with his achievement, and clapping his hands.

“Confound your big head, ye imp, that’s half an hour’s work ye hae gi’en us.”

“Mind what ye say, mason; imps hae het fingers.”

The exhibition of his strength, the tales they had heard of him, and his malicious

look silenced the imprecations they were disposed to express.

“Noo, I’ll tell ye something,” said Hornie, as they were recommencing operations, “ye’ll hae to gang and get bigger stanes—big eneuch and heavy eneuch to wedge themsel’s thegither.”

The men were at first inclined to treat the suggestion with the contempt of those who always know their own business best. But ultimately they yielded, and three of them were about to start upon the errand, leaving two behind them to continue working.

“Haud a wee,” cried Hornie, “there’s ae stane in the court beside the well that would be better than half a dozen put thegither, only it’ll tak’ the five o’ ye, and maybe mair, to carry’t.”

This suggestion was also adopted, and the five men proceeded briskly in search of the stone.

“Safe still,” thought Gilbert as he heard the footsteps moving away.

He stood up and placed his hand upon the door to throw it open.

Voices, loud and angry, and amongst them the voice of Heron Barras.

He had met the masons at the end of the passage and brought them back to complete their work before they quitted the place. With a sickening dread the prisoner heard the operations proceed. One hope was still left to him—the door was unfastened, and the masonry might be pushed down.

“How’s that?” demanded Barras harshly; “yonder bolt is withdrawn.”

All professed ignorance of the means by which the bolt had been drawn; and the master secured it with his own hand.

Big drops of cold perspiration started upon the brow of Gilbert as he listened to the rasping sound of the bolt as it was thrust back into its socket. Sounds fell duller and duller upon his ear, thus indicating the progress of the entombment. At last the sounds ceased, and he knew that it was all over.

He reeled from the door, to which he had clung desperately. One of his spurs having got loose, was caught by something in the floor, and he fell.

There was a bitter hatred in his breast, and he felt that he could have died more peacefully had he been permitted to meet Barras in open field.

He bent forward to release his foot from the spur, which he found sticking into a seam between two of the stones of the floor.

The water was murmuring below; the cement was soft from the constant moisture of the place.

Could he not loosen one of the stones with his spur? There would be, at least, speedy relief from the lingering death to which he had been doomed.

He seized the spur and began to scrape the cement round one of the stones; it was soft, and yielded readily. He wrought savagely—he wrought for death.

Scrape, scrape, scrape—the fingers ached,

the brain throbbed ; but he cared nothing. He worked on viciously.

He was kneeling upon the stone he was trying to loosen ; and it seemed suddenly as if he had touched some hidden spring, for the floor swayed beneath him, the light danced and flickered before his eyes. Then darkness, and the loud roar of waters which seemed to rush in upon him and overwhelm him as he fell through the floor into the dark tumultuous water below.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A SINGULAR WOOING.

“ A wight went a-wooing a pretty maid—  
Sing hey, sing ho, sing down a derry.  
He offered his heart, but she tost her head—  
Sing hey, sing ho, sing down a derry.

“ And he found that another had woo’d and won—  
Sing hey, sing ho, sing down a derry.  
And he swore by’r lady that blood should run !  
Sing hey, sing ho, sing down a derry.”

*Old Ballad of Marjorie.*

MISTRESS SPENS was in a passion. She had been tricked, trepanned, and she was again at the mercy of one whom she had good reason to regard as an enemy, a cruel conscienceless enemy.

So she was in a passion.

Since the sacking of Halstane till the

present time the phase of her character which her misfortunes had most developed had been that of endurance. Through all, she had suffered keenly, pitiably. There had been no complaints of the hardness of her lot, no quarrelling with fate.

That was all changed now. Her husband dead, his name disgraced, and the disgrace reflected upon herself and upon her child, her cause by treachery blasted in the eyes of the people ; herself cajoled into the power of a villain, and a world of dark indefinable miseries before her—the meek suffering lady was transformed into a passionate woman.

The transformation is quite comprehensible. It is only the brave of heart who can endure ; and therefore, when everything seemed lost, her courage only obtained another direction, and she was prepared now by cunning intrigue or by force to win back something of what she had been bereft.

Half recognizing the change herself, in a bitter passionate spirit she paced the cham-

ber, lips compressed and fingers linked together tightly.

Two days she had been detained in Edinburgh under various pretences and promises made by the man who had presented himself to her in the Abbey Chapel as her friend. He served her with food, always appearing in armour and with visor closed, as when she had first seen him. No one else entered the place, in which she soon found that she was a prisoner. She had entreated to be allowed to return to the Palace—she had threatened, and she was always answered in one even voice, that any rashness on her part would ruin her friends and her cause.

The doubt that was suggested by the answer, and her failure to recognize the man, made her patient. On the evening of the third day she was hurriedly carried from the city and brought blindfolded into this chamber, which she recognized at once, when her eyes were uncovered, and by the recognition understood the rest.

It was the same chamber in the Tower of Tushielaw from which she had formerly been rescued by Gilbert Elliot ; and it was Adam Scott who had successfully wiled her from friends and safety.

On the discovery of this all the latent energy of her nature rose in repugnance to the man, and to the resolution to play the fox's game with all the cunning of which she was capable.

When Tushielaw presented himself—no longer in armour, but in a plain suit of stout woollen stuff—he found her seated, her softly rounded arms leaning upon the table, her hands clasped, and her smooth white brow resting upon them.

He was somewhat surprised when she looked up quietly, and, seeing him, drooped her eyes and rose as if in deference to his presence. He had come prepared for tears, remonstrance, and upbraiding. He met none of them, and accordingly he was puzzled as well as astonished.

His puzzlement made him awkward. Any

reception except this would have presented no difficulty to him. He could have borne her upbraidings, he could have shown her how useless were threats; but this meek resignation was beyond his comprehension, and so beyond his power to cope with. He neither knew how to address her, nor upon what subject to speak.

He stood gazing darkly at her, and uneasily plucking his beard. At length, with a gruff uncomfortable snort—

“By the mass, my lady, you take more kindly to your cage than I expected.”

“It is of little count to me where I may be now,” she answered, sighing.

He was pleased, for he saw that he was approaching the fulfilment of his wishes, and the lands and privileges of Halstane should be doubly his.

“Say you?—then you would as lief be here as at the Palace yonder?”

“I scarcely know, I care so little where I go or stay.”

“Then be those who care for you the

judges of your fit resting-place," he said hotly, his fierce eyes burning with hope.

She raised her head and met his gaze, so placidly, so indifferently, that his ardour was slightly soured.

"Who cares for me?—who can care for the penniless wife of a dishonoured man?"

"Folk have queer notions sometimes, and I've got mine, and when they're worth the holding to I hold to them till they are satisfied. One of my notions has been to care for you a bit, and you can judge whether or not I have stuck to it. Through good and bad I'll stick to it yet, till you have thrown your widowhood aside or till I die."

"You have pressed this matter before."

He brought his clenched fist down upon the table with an oath.

"And I'll press it again and again until you yield. There shall nothing stand between us whilst I've got strength or wit to make a clear gate."

"Another time we will speak of this."

“No, by my hand, we shall speak on’t now. Look you, Mistress Spens, and mind well. You are husbandless, and without me you are next to friendless. Without me what is there for you and for your bairn ? ”

“I am indeed friendless,” she said with subdued bitterness.

“Except for me, you are wholly friendless.”

“Except for you ? ”

There was scorn and loathing in the accent, but he did not observe it.

“Then what for should you think twice ? I am as good a man as ever was Wat Spens ; my arms as strong, my gear as great, my larder as well filled, and there are braw stout lads in plenty to keep it so and to do your will. What for should you think twice ? ”

In his eagerness he bent so close to her that she could feel his hot breath upon her cheek, and it needed all her strength to restrain the shudder she felt creeping over

her and to suppress the cry of hate that was rising in her throat. She succeeded, however, and responded calmly enough.

“You are my enemy.”

“Your enemy in what?”

“Have you not sacked Halstane?”

“That was because of your stubborn humour, mistress, and with no wish of mine.”

“Are you not the accuser of my husband?”

“That was my ill luck more than my desire. He was false to his country, a traitor to his King, and how could I do else than accuse him?—besides, he was your husband.”

“And if you cared for me that should have been his safeguard from your lying charge.”

“I saw it in another light,” he answered surlily.

“Have you not accused me as his accomplice?—have you not said enough to have hanged me had not our Queen—

the Holy Mother bless her for it—interfered to save me?”

“And for all that you have yourself to blame.”

“Myself?”

“Ay, yourself, and no other. If I accused you, do you think I would have let you die?”

“What else could you do?”

“I had influence and secret means of saving you.”

“If they had failed?”

“I would have burned Palace and city to the ground rather than a hair of your head should have been harmed.”

“Then why should you have placed me in so much peril?”

“That I might show you which of us was strongest, that I might prove to you the weakness of your cause, and compel you to seek shelter from the only one who offers it—myself. I was cruel because I cared more for you than I know how to tell you; and I can be cruel again for the same reason.”

“I can defy your cruelty now, I am so hopeless.”

And she sank upon a chair as if quite wearied out.

He scowled and began to pluck his tough beard again with the same uneasy manner as before.

“Humph—you do not care then to see this Master Elliot again?”

She looked up quickly.

“I would give——”

“What?”

He was watching her savagely. So she had paused.

“Tut, it matters nothing to me whether I never see him again or no.”

“Matters nothing whether he lives or dies—um?”

“Nothing,” she returned slowly.

“That is so much the better for him. But there is one you care a little more for, I think. The bonnie lassie, your bairn.”

Mistress Spens trembled now in good earnest.

“ My bairn ?—you cannot harm her—she, at least, is safe.”

“ She is at this minute in my charge.”

“ Wretch—you dare not harm her.”

“ I dare anything that may win me what I desire. I have taken a notion to have you for wife, and I shall have my way if all the world was up in arms against me. You shall pronounce whether the bonny doo is to see to-morrow’s light or no. Speak, then, yea or nay ? ”

“ Give me time to think.”

“ You have had time enough.”

“ Let me see the bairn.”

“ Not until you are Mistress Scott. When that matter is settled you shall have the lassie, and a bien house to keep her comfortable in.”

“ If I refuse ? ”

“ You shall never see her—you shall never leave this place.”

“ You are deceiving me still,” she said indignantly. “ The child is beyond your reach. The poor trick you would play is

plain to me as the sun at noon. You would fright me into consenting to a union that is hateful to me ; but my resolution is fixed, and you shall not move me from it."

"As you will, then ; but mind you, whatever happens, upon yourself rests the blame and guilt."

He was leaving the chamber.

"Stay," she cried agitatedly.

"Do you consent?"

"I will answer to-morrow."

"Do you consent?"

A pause, then with a slow painful breath—

"Yes. I consent."

He seized her in his brawny arms, and, despite her struggles, kissed her on the cheek. She broke from his grasp.

"There are conditions to my promise," she said angrily, for his kiss burned upon her cheek.

"What conditions?"

"That Gilbert Elliot shall be set free."

"It shall be done."

"That my child be restored to me."

“ I understood that.”

“ And you must wed me in Selkirk Chapel.”

“ Is that all ? ”

“ That is all.”

“ You shall have your way, by my troth, and a right merry wedding it will be for all the fashes of our wooing.”

She was glad he went away from her, for she felt that, had he remained only a few minutes longer, all the bitter loathing she had struggled to keep within bounds would have found vent. Another touch of his hand or lips and all the hate with which she regarded him would have displayed itself.

She was glad he was gone, but her brain was hot and feverish ; the atmosphere of the chamber seemed close and suffocating. For some minutes she could scarcely breathe.

A chill draught crossed her burning cheeks, and she started, shuddering and covering her face with her hands.

The full horror of the position in which she was placed presented itself to her now,

and every thought seemed to pass like fire through her brain.

She had promised to become his wife—wife of the man whom most of all beings or things she loathed. She had promised, and it might be that Walter Spens still lived.

The colour left her face, and a cold expression of resolution gradually became fixed upon it. This was her thought—

“If I fail to obtain protection from the holy men of Selkirk there is one last means of escape left me.”

It was late, and there were only half a dozen men in the hall of the Tower—the others had gone to roost—when Tushielaw entered, his dark countenance bright with gleeful excitement.

“Ho, there, somebody fill me a flagon of wine, and drink all of you to the toast I’ll give. Come, fill, Hornie, fill.”

Hornie, grinning as was usual with him whether the occasion was gay or sad, obeyed the master.

Heron Barras, who in his friar's garb was seated at the ingle, placidly drinking and meditating as he watched the enormous fire crackle and blaze, looked round sharply, and his false smile began to fade as he observed the joy of his friend.

"She has consented?" he asked in an undertone.

"You shall hear," was the boisterous answer. "Now, lads, drink to the dregs—the Mistress of Tushielaw."

"The Mistress of Tushielaw!" exclaimed all in surprise; but they drank without questioning more than by looks.

"Drink again, lads, and to-morrow we shall have such feasting as never was known at a Border bridal before."

He emptied another goblet as he spoke, and his boisterous humour became more boisterous in consequence. Gripping Barras by the arm, he said in his ear—

"You are a scribe, Mess Simon?"

"Thanks to the monks of Melrose, I am, and my skill has been proved by the

trick which spared you a tussle at Edinburgh."

"Hush—we must let him go."

"Must we?" (This with a sneer.)

"Ay, we must; I have given her my word on't."

"Which is not worth much, at best."

"We shall see. But you write me a message to the priest of Selkirk, bidding him be ready to tie a man and woman together the-morn as fast as his prayers can tie them."

"I'll do it; but before the prayers are said you must place in my hands the papers of Binram."

"That is settled."

"Then I will do your behest."

"Are your eyes open, Pate? You must ride to Selkirk."

Ding-a'-Doon rose lazily to his feet, stretching his giant frame as if he would have much preferred his seat at the ingle to the journey proposed to him.

"Ay, I am ready."

"Then you shall speed to Selkirk Chapel

and deliver the packet I'll give you. Hornie can go with you. Get horses ready at once."

Barras had procured an ink-horn and paper and was preparing to indite the epistle; Ding-a'-Doon was moving toward the door; Hornie had disappeared, and the others were staring into the fire and puzzling their dull wits to make out the meaning of all that was going forward, when they were startled by a strange weird voice which seemed to belong to somebody outside the central window of the hall. The knowledge of the impossibility of any human creature having the power to obtain a footing out there, or of being able to reach the window from below, filled their superstitious minds with fear.

The words which were spoken by the eerie voice completed their terror, and made them start from their seats trembling. Warningly came the words—

"Wae, wae for the lot  
O' the braw house o' Scott,

If ane o' its name  
Sall bring till his hame,  
Frae Yarrow's murk glens,  
As marrow, a Spens."

A deathly stillness followed, for not one of them, bold and reckless as they all were, dared draw his breath for the first few minutes after that strange warning had been spoken.

Barras held his pen suspended over the paper, the while his head was raised and his eyes turned toward the place from which the sound had seemed to proceed.

Tushielaw stood behind him clutching him by the arm with one hand, the other grasping his poignard. All the effects of his potations had disappeared from his countenance, leaving it dark and alarmed.

Pate, the giant, had paused at the door with a look of stupefied fright, and the rest were in a similar condition.

"What fool's cantrips is this?" roared Tushielaw, with forced courage. "By my sword! he shall pay dearly for the jest."

He rushed to the window, but as he reached it a flash of light met him and he staggered back.

Yetholm Will and Eddie Craig were down upon their knees crossing themselves as fast as they were able, and muttering as much of a prayer as they could remember. Ding-a'-Doon clung to the door, terror-stricken. Barras did not alter his position, but his sallow countenance became a shade more sallow.

The door was suddenly burst open, and Ding-a'-Doon gave vent to an oath, indicating by its expression of terror that he fully expected to see the arch enemy enter in state; and another oath, indicative of rage, when he saw that it was only Hornie who appeared.

"I hae seen the deil, I hae seen the deil," cried the dwarf in his loud voice, and with every appearance of distraction. "I hae seen the deil fleeing wi' a green licht aboon the Tower."

"Silence," roared Tushielaw, furiously. "I defy the devil and all his imps."

He drained a goblet of wine with a fierce air, as if in doing so he were defying the fiend. But for all the hardihood with which he tried to brave out the affair, the singular occurrence had affected him deeply. All his fury was assumed to conceal his fear.

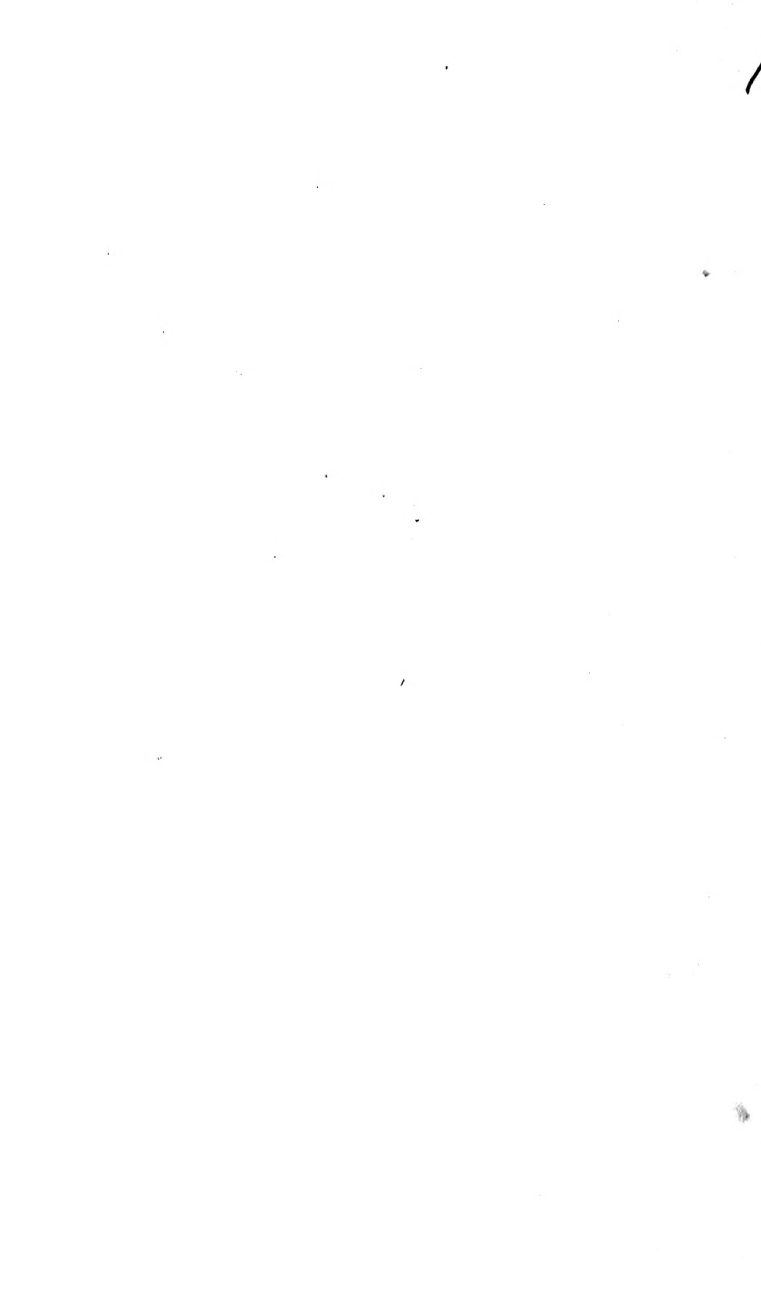
“You write me that message, Mess Simon; and you, Pate, go do my bidding. To saddle, quick, and take that limb of Satan with you”—indicating Hornie—“he’ll serve to keep his master at bay.”

Ding-a’-Doon, with surly submission, griped the dwarf by the arm and drew him along to the stable.

Barras quietly finished the note and gave it to Tushielaw. Neither spoke of the warning they had heard, or seemed to think of giving it any heed.

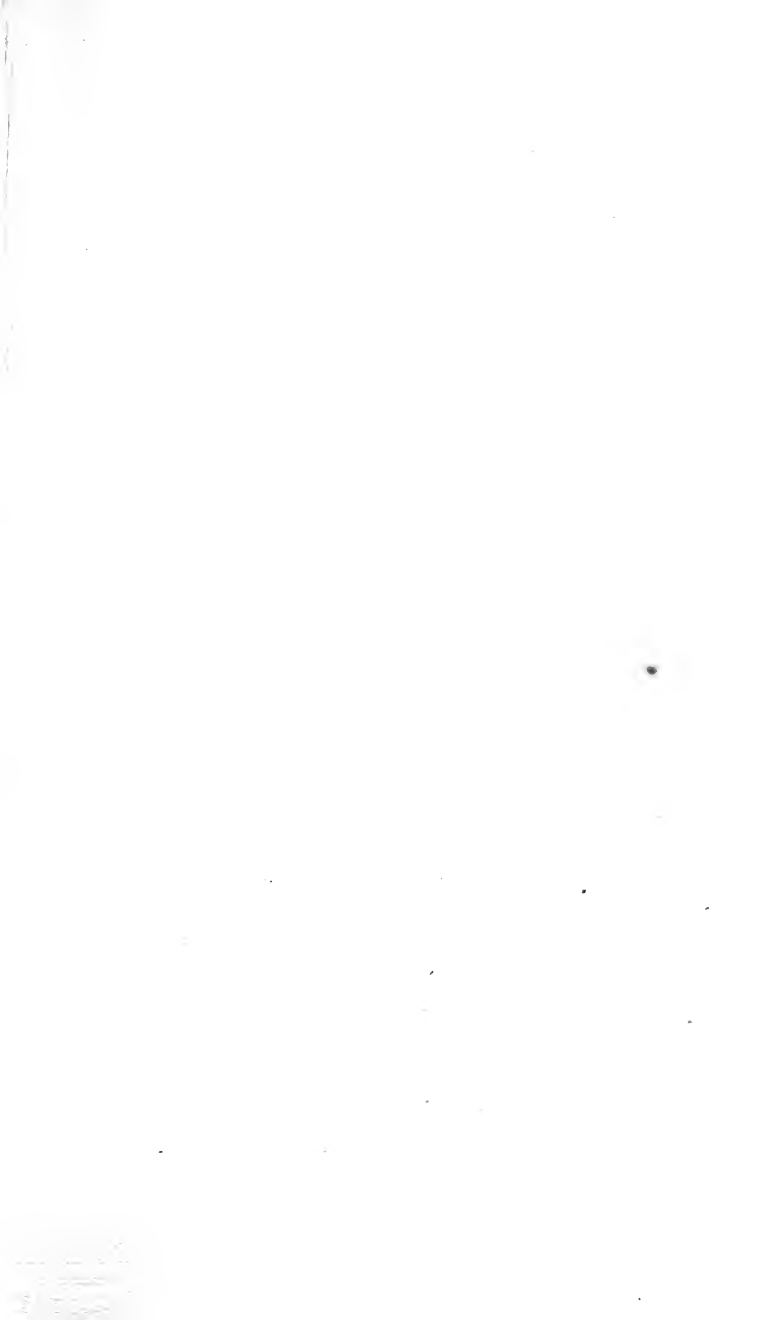
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